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THE POEMS OF ROBERT FROST

With an Introductory Essay
"THE CONSTANT SYMBOL"
by the Author

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THE CONSTANT SYMBOL

There seems to be some such folk saying as that easy to understand is contemptible, hard to understand irritating The implication is that just easy enough, just hard enough, right in the middle, is what literary criticism ought to foster A glance backward over the past convinces me otherwise The *Iliad, Odyssey,* and *Aeneid* are easy The *Purgatorio* is said to be hard The Song of Songs *is* hard There have been works lately to surpass all records for hardness Some knotted riddles tell that may be worth our trouble But hard or easy seems to me of slight use as a test either way

Texture is surely something A good piece of weaving takes rank with a picture as decoration for the wall of a studio, though it must be admitted to verge on the arty There is a time of apprenticeship to texture when it shouldn't matter if the stuff is never made up into anything There may be scraps of repeated form all over it But form as a whole! Don't be shocking! The title of his first book was

Fragments The artist has to grow up and coarsen a little before he looks on texture as not an end in itself

There are many other things I have found myself saying about poetry, but the chiefest of these is that it is metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority Poetry is simply made of metaphor So also is philosophy—and science, too, for that matter, if it will take the soft impeachment from a friend Every poem is a new metaphor inside or it is nothing And there is a sense in which all poems are the same old metaphor always

Every single poem written regular is a symbol small or great of the way the will has to pitch into commitments deeper and deeper to a rounded conclusion and then be judged for whether any original intention it had has been strongly spent or weakly lost, be it in art, politics, school, church, business, love, or marriage—in a piece of work or in a career Strongly spent is synonymous with kept

We may speak after sentence, resenting judgment How can the world know anything so intimate as what we were intending to do? The answer is the world presumes to know The ruling passion in man is not as Viennese as is claimed It is rather a gregarious instinct to keep together by minding

each other's business Grex rather than sex We *must* be preserved from becoming egregious The beauty of socialism is that it will end the individuality that is always crying out mind your own business Terence's answer would be all human business is my business No more invisible means of support, no more invisible motives, no more invisible anything The ultimate commitment is giving in to it that an outsider may see what we were up to sooner and better than we ourselves The bard has said in effect, Unto these forms did I commend the spirit It may take him a year after the act to confess he only betrayed the spirit with a rhymster's cleverness and to forgive his enemies the critics for not having listened to his oaths and protestations to the contrary Had he anything to be true to? Was he true to it? Did he use good words? You couldn't tell unless you made out what idea they were supposed to be good for Every poem is an epitome of the great predicament, a figure of the will braving alien entanglements

Take the President in the White House A study of the success of his intention might have to go clear back to when as a young politician, youthfully stepcareless, he made the choice between the two parties of our system He may have stood for a moment wishing he knew of a third party nearer the ideal;

but only for a moment, since he was practical And in fact he may have been so little impressed with the importance of his choice that he left his first commitment to be made for him by his friends and relatives It was only a small commitment anyway, like a kiss He can scarcely remember how much credit he deserved personally for the decision it took Calculation is usually no part in the first step in any walk And behold him now a statesman so multifariously closed in on with obligations and answerabilities that sometimes he loses his august temper He might as well have got himself into a sestina royal

Or he may be a religious nature who lightly gets committed to a nameable church through an older friend in plays and games at the Y M C A The next he knows he is in a theological school and next in the pulpit of a Sunday wrestling with the angel for a blessing on his self-defensive interpretation of the Creed What of his original intention now? At least he has had the advantage of having it more in his heart than in his head, so that he should have made shift to assert it without being chargeable with compromise He could go a long way before he had to declare anything he could be held to He began with freedom to squander He has to acknowledge himself in a tighter and tighter place But his cour-

age asked for it It would have been the same if he had gone to the North Pole or climbed Everest All that concerns *us* is whether his story was one of conformance or performance

There's an indulgent smile I get for the recklessness of the unnecessary commitment I made when I came to the first line in the second stanza of a poem in this book called "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" I was riding too high to care what trouble I incurred And it was all right so long as I didn't suffer deflection

The poet goes in like a rope skipper to make the most of his opportunities If he trips himself he stops the rope He is of our stock and has been brought up by ear to choice of two metres, strict iambic and loose iambic (not to count varieties of the latter) He may have any length of line up to six feet He may use an assortment of line lengths for any shape of stanza like Herrick in "To Daffodils" Not that he is running wild His intention is of course a particular mood that won't be satisfied with anything less than its own fulfillment But it is not yet a thought concerned with what becomes it One thing to know it by it shrinks shyly from anticipatory expression Tell love beforehand and, as Blake says, it loses flow without filling the mould, the cast will be a reject The freshness of a poem

belongs absolutely to its not having been thought out and then set to verse as the verse in turn might be set to music A poem is the emotion of having a thought while the reader waits a little anxiously for the success of dawn The only discipline to begin with is the inner mood that at worst may give the poet a false start or two like the almost microscopic filament of cotton that goes before the blunt thread-end and must be picked up first by the eye of the needle He must be entranced to the exact premonition No mystery is meant When familiar friends approach each other in the street both are apt to have this experience in feeling before knowing the pleasantry they will inflict on each other in passing

Probably there is something between the mood and the vocal imagination (images of the voice speaking) that determines a man's first commitment to metre and length of line

Suppose him to have written down "When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes " He has uttered about as much as he has to live up to in the theme as in the form Odd how the two advance into the open pari passu He has given out that he will descend into Hades, but he has confided in no one how far before he will turn back, or whether he will turn back at all, and by what jutting points of rock

he will pick his way He may proceed as in blank verse Two lines more, however, and he has let himself in for rhyme, three more and he has set himself a stanza Up to this point his discipline has been the self-discipline whereof it is written in so great praise The harsher discipline from without is now well begun He who knows not both knows neither His worldly commitments are now three or four deep Between us, he was no doubt bent on the sonnet in the first place from habit, and what's the use in pretending he was a freer agent than he had any ambition to be? He had made most of his commitments all in one plunge The only suspense he asks us to share with him is in the theme He goes down, for instance, to a depth that must surprise him as much as it does us But he doesn't even have the say of how long his piece will be Any worry is as to whether he will outlast or last out the fourteen lines—have to cramp or stretch to come out even—have enough bread for the butter or butter for the bread As a matter of fact, he gets through in twelve lines and doesn't know quite what to do with the last two

Things like that and worse are the reason the sonnet is so suspect a form and has driven so many to free verse and even to the novel Many a quatrain is salvaged from a sonnet that went agley Dobson

confesses frankly to having changed from one form to another after starting "I intended an Ode and it turned to a Sonnet" But he reverses the usual order of being driven from the harder down to the easier And he has a better excuse for weakness of will than most, namely, Rose

Jeremiah, it seems, has had his sincerity questioned because the anguish of his lamentations was tamable to the form of twenty-two stanzas for the twenty-two letters of the alphabet The Hebrew alphabet has been kept to the twenty-two letters it came out of Egypt with, so the number twenty-two means as much form as ever

But there they go again with the old doubt about law and order (The communist looks forward to a day of order without law, bless his merciful heart) To the right person it must seem naive to distrust form as such The very words of the dictionary are a restriction to make the best of or stay out of and be silent Coining new words isn't encouraged We play the words as we find them We make them do Form in language is such a disjected lot of old broken pieces it seems almost as non-existent as the spirit till the two embrace in the sky They are not to be thought of as encountering in rivalry but in creation No judgment on either alone counts We see what Whitman's extravagance may have meant when he said the body was the soul

Here is where it all comes out The mind is a baby giant who, more provident in the cradle than he knows, has hurled his paths in life all round ahead of him like playthings given—data so-called They are vocabulary, grammar, prosody, and diary, and it will go hard if he can't find stepping stones of them for his feet wherever he wants to go The way will be zigzag, but it will be a straight crookedness like the walking stick he cuts himself in the bushes for an emblem He will be judged as he does or doesn't let this zig or that zag project him off out of his general direction

Teacher or student or investigator whose chance on these defenseless lines may seize, your pardon if for once I point you out what ordinarily you would point me out To some it will seem strange that I have written my verse regular all this time without knowing till yesterday that it was from fascination with this constant symbol I celebrate To the right person it will seem lucky, since in finding out too much too soon there is danger of arrest Does anyone believe I would have committed myself to the treason-reason-season rhyme-set in my "Reluctance" if I had been blasé enough to know that these three words about exhausted the possibilities? No rhyming dictionary for me to make me face the facts of rhyme I may say the strain of rhyming is less since I came to see words as phrase-ends to

countless phrases just as the syllables ly, ing, and ation are word-ends to countless words Leave something to learn later We'd have lost most of our innocence by forty anyway even if we never went to school a day

TO THE RIGHT PERSON

Fourteen Lines

In the one state of ours that is a shire
There is a District Schoolhouse I admire—
As much for anything for situation
There are few institutions standing higher
This side the Rockies in my estimation—
Two thousand feet above the ocean level
It has two entries for co-education
But there's a tight-shut look to either door
And to the windows of its fenestration
As if to say mere knowledge was the devil,
And this school wasn't keeping any more,
Unless for penitents who took their seat
Upon its doorsteps as at Mercy's feet
To make up for a lack of meditation

ROBERT FROST

July, 1946

A Boy's Will

THE PASTURE

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring,
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may)
I sha'n't be gone long —You come too

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother It's so young,
It totters when she licks it with her tongue
I sha'n't be gone long —You come too

INTO MY OWN

One of my wishes is that those dark trees,
So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze,
Were not, as 'twere, the merest mask of gloom,
But stretched away unto the edge of doom

I should not be withheld but that some day
Into their vastness I should steal away,
Fearless of ever finding open land,
Or highway where the slow wheel pours the sand

I do not see why I should e'er turn back,
Or those should not set forth upon my track
To overtake me, who should miss me here
And long to know if still I held them dear

They would not find me changed from him they knew—
Only more sure of all I thought was true

GHOST HOUSE

I dwell in a lonely house I know
That vanished many a summer ago,
 And left no trace but the cellar walls,
 And a cellar in which the daylight falls,
And the purple-stemmed wild raspberries grow

O'er ruined fences the grape-vines shield
The woods come back to the mowing field,
 The orchard tree has grown one copse
 Of new wood and old where the woodpecker chops,
The footpath down to the well is healed

I dwell with a strangely aching heart
In that vanished abode there far apart
 On that disused and forgotten road
 That has no dust-bath now for the toad.
Night comes, the black bats tumble and dart,

The whippoorwill is coming to shout
And hush and cluck and flutter about
 I hear him begin far enough away
 Full many a time to say his say
Before he arrives to say it out

It is under the small, dim, summer star
I know not who these mute folk are
 Who share the unlit place with me—
 Those stones out under the low-limbed tree
Doubtless bear names that the mosses mar

They are tireless folk, but slow and sad,
Though two, close-keeping, are lass and lad,—
 With none among them that ever sings,
 And yet, in view of how many things,
As sweet companions as might be had

MY NOVEMBER GUEST

My Sorrow, when she's here with me,
Thinks these dark days of autumn rain
Are beautiful as days can be,
She loves the bare, the withered tree,
She walks the sodden pasture lane

Her pleasure will not let me stay
She talks and I am fain to list
She's glad the birds are gone away,
She's glad her simple worsted grey
Is silver now with clinging mist

The desolate, deserted trees,
The faded earth, the heavy sky,
The beauties she so truly sees,
She thinks I have no eye for these,
And vexes me for reason why

Not yesterday I learned to know
The love of bare November days
Before the coming of the snow,
But it were vain to tell her so,
And they are better for her praise

LOVE AND A QUESTION

A Stranger came to the door at eve,
And he spoke the bridegroom fair.
He bore a green-white stick in his hand,
And, for all burden, care
He asked with the eyes more than the lips
For a shelter for the night,
And he turned and looked at the road afar
Without a window light

The bridegroom came forth into the porch
With 'Let us look at the sky,
And question what of the night to be,
Stranger, you and I'
The woodbine leaves littered the yard,
The woodbine berries were blue,
Autumn, yes, winter was in the wind,
'Stranger, I wish I knew'

Within, the bride in the dusk alone
Bent over the open fire,
Her face rose-red with the glowing coal
And the thought of the heart's desire
The bridegroom looked at the weary road,
Yet saw but her within,
And wished her heart in a case of gold
And pinned with a silver pin

The bridegroom thought it little to give
 A dole of bread, a purse,
A heartfelt prayer for the poor of God,
 Or for the rich a curse,
But whether or not a man was asked
 To mar the love of two
By harboring woe in the bridal house,
 The bridegroom wished he knew

STARS

How countlessly they congregate
 O'er our tumultuous snow,
Which flows in shapes as tall as trees
 When wintry winds do blow!—

As if with keenness for our fate,
 Our faltering few steps on
To white rest, and a place of rest
 Invisible at dawn,—

And yet with neither love nor hate,
 Those stars like some snow-white
Minerva's snow-white marble eyes
 Without the gift of sight

STORM FEAR

When the wind works against us in the dark,
And pelts with snow
The lower chamber window on the east,
And whispers with a sort of stifled bark,
The beast,
'Come out! Come out!'—
It costs no inward struggle not to go,
Ah, no!
I count our strength,
Two and a child,
Those of us not asleep subdued to mark
How the cold creeps as the fire dies at length,
How drifts are piled,
Dooryard and road ungraded,
Till even the comforting barn grows far away,
And my heart owns a doubt
Whether 'tis in us to arise with day
And save ourselves unaided

TO THE THAWING WIND

Come with rain, O loud Southwester!
Bring the singer, bring the nester,
Give the buried flower a dream,
Make the settled snow-bank stream,
Find the brown beneath the white,
But whate'er you do to-night,
Bathe my window, make it flow,
Melt it as the ice will go,
Melt the glass and leave the sticks
Like a hermit's crucifix,
Burst into my narrow stall,
Swing the picture on the wall,
Run the rattling pages o'er,
Scatter poems on the floor,
Turn the poet out of door

A PRAYER IN SPRING

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers to-day;
And give us not to think so far away
As the uncertain harvest, keep us here
All simply in the springing of the year.

Oh, give us pleasure in the orchard white,
Like nothing else by day, like ghosts by night;
And make us happy in the happy bees,
The swarm dilating round the perfect trees

And make us happy in the darting bird
That suddenly above the bees is heard,
The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,
And off a blossom in mid air stands still

For this is love and nothing else is love,
The which it is reserved for God above
To sanctify to what far ends He will,
But which it only needs that we fulfil

FLOWER-GATHERING

I left you in the morning,
And in the morning glow,
You walked a way beside me
To make me sad to go
Do you know me in the gloaming,
Gaunt and dusty grey with roaming?
Are you dumb because you know me not,
Or dumb because you know?

All for me? And not a question
For the faded flowers gay
That could take me from beside you
For the ages of a day?
They are yours, and be the measure
Of their worth for you to treasure,
The measure of the little while
That I've been long away

ROSE POGONIAS

A saturated meadow,
 Sun-shaped and jewel-small,
A circle scarcely wider
 Than the trees around were tall,
Where winds were quite excluded,
 And the air was stifling sweet
With the breath of many flowers,—
 A temple of the heat

There we bowed us in the burning,
 As the sun's right worship is,
To pick where none could miss them
 A thousand orchises,
For though the grass was scattered,
 Yet every second spear
Seemed tipped with wings of color,
 That tinged the atmosphere

We raised a simple prayer
 Before we left the spot,
That in the general mowing
 That place might be forgot,
Or if not all so favoured,
 Obtain such grace of hours,
That none should mow the grass there
 While so confused with flowers

WAITING

AFIELD AT DUSK

What things for dream there are when spectre-like,
Moving among tall haycocks lightly piled,
I enter alone upon the stubble field,
From which the laborers' voices late have died,
And in the antiphony of afterglow
And rising full moon, sit me down
Upon the full moon's side of the first haycock
And lose myself amid so many alike

I dream upon the opposing lights of the hour,
Preventing shadow until the moon prevail,
I dream upon the night-hawks peopling heaven,
Each circling each with vague unearthly cry,
Or plunging headlong with fierce twang afar,
And on the bat's mute antics, who would seem
Dimly to have made out my secret place,
Only to lose it when he pirouettes,
And seek it endlessly with purblind haste,
On the last swallow's sweep, and on the rasp
In the abyss of odor and rustle at my back,
That, silenced by my advent, finds once more,
After an interval, his instrument,
And tries once—twice—and thrice if I be there;
And on the worn book of old-golden song
I brought not here to read, it seems, but hold

And freshen in this air of withering sweetness;
But on the memory of one absent most,
For whom these lines when they shall greet her eye.

IN NEGLECT

They leave us so to the way we took,
 As two in whom they were proved mistaken,
That we sit sometimes in the wayside nook,
With mischievous, vagrant, seraphic look,
 And *try* if we cannot feel forsaken

THE VANTAGE POINT

If tired of trees I seek again mankind,
 Well I know where to hie me—in the dawn,
 To a slope where the cattle keep the lawn
There amid lolling juniper reclined,
Myself unseen, I see in white defined
 Far off the homes of men, and farther still,
 The graves of men on an opposing hill,
Living or dead, whichever are to mind

And if by noon I have too much of these,
 I have but to turn on my arm, and lo,
 The sun-burned hillside sets my face aglow,
My breathing shakes the bluet like a breeze,
 I smell the earth, I smell the bruisèd plant,
 I look into the crater of the ant

MOWING

There was never a sound beside the wood but one,
And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground
What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself,
Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound—
And that was why it whispered and did not speak
It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,
Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf
Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak
To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows,
Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers
(Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.
The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

GOING FOR WATER

The well was dry beside the door,
And so we went with pail and can
Across the fields behind the house
To seek the brook if still it ran,

Not loth to have excuse to go,
Because the autumn eve was fair
(Though chill), because the fields were ours,
And by the brook our woods were there

We ran as if to meet the moon
That slowly dawned behind the trees,
The barren boughs without the leaves,
Without the birds, without the breeze.

But once within the wood, we paused
Like gnomes that hid us from the moon,
Ready to run to hiding new
With laughter when she found us soon.

Each laid on other a staying hand
To listen ere we dared to look,
And in the hush we joined to make
We heard, we knew we heard the brook

A note as from a single place,
 A slender tinkling fall that made
Now drops that floated on the pool
 Like pearls, and now a silver blade

REVELATION

We make ourselves a place apart
 Behind light words that tease and flout,
But oh, the agitated heart
 Till someone find us really out

'Tis pity if the case require
 (Or so we say) that in the end
We speak the literal to inspire
 The understanding of a friend

But so with all, from babes that play
 At hide-and-seek to God afar,
So all who hide too well away
 Must speak and tell us where they are

THE TUFT OF FLOWERS

I went to turn the grass once after one
Who mowed it in the dew before the sun

The dew was gone that made his blade so keen
Before I came to view the levelled scene

I looked for him behind an isle of trees,
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze

But he had gone his way, the grass all mown,
And I must be, as he had been,—alone,

'As all must be,' I said within my heart,
'Whether they work together or apart'

But as I said it, swift there passed me by
On noiseless wing a bewildered butterfly,

Seeking with memories grown dim o'er night
Some resting flower of yesterday's delight

And once I marked his flight go round and round,
As where some flower lay withering on the ground

And then he flew as far as eye could see,
And then on tremulous wing came back to me

I thought of questions that have no reply,
And would have turned to toss the grass to dry,

But he turned first, and led my eye to look
At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook,

A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared
Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared

I left my place to know them by their name,
Finding them butterfly weed when I came

The mower in the dew had loved them thus,
By leaving them to flourish, not for us,

Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him,
But from sheer morning gladness at the brim

The butterfly and I had lit upon,
Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,

That made me hear the wakening birds around,
And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground,

And feel a spirit kindred to my own,
So that henceforth I worked no more alone;

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade,

And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach

'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,
'Whether they work together or apart'

THE DEMIURGE'S LAUGH

It was far in the sameness of the wood,
I was running with joy on the Demon's trail,
Though I knew what I hunted was no true god
It was just as the light was beginning to fail
That I suddenly heard—all I needed to hear
It has lasted me many and many a year

The sound was behind me instead of before,
A sleepy sound, but mocking half,
As of one who utterly couldn't care
The Demon arose from his wallow to laugh,
Brushing the dirt from his eye as he went,
And well I knew what the Demon meant

I shall not forget how his laugh rang out
I felt as a fool to have been so caught,
And checked my steps to make pretence
It was something among the leaves I sought
(Though doubtful whether he stayed to see)
Thereafter I sat me against a tree

A LINE-STORM SONG

The line-storm clouds fly tattered and swift,
The road is forlorn all day,
Where a myriad snowy quartz stones lift,
And the hoof-prints vanish away
The roadside flowers, too wet for the bee,
Expend their bloom in vain
Come over the hills and far with me,
And be my love in the rain

The birds have less to say for themselves
In the wood-world's torn despair
Than now these numberless years the elves,
Although they are no less there
All song of the woods is crushed like some
Wild, easily shattered rose
Come, be my love in the wet woods, come,
Where the boughs rain when it blows

There is the gale to urge behind
And bruit our singing down,
And the shallow waters aflutter with wind
From which to gather your gown
What matter if we go clear to the west,
And come not through dry-shod?
For wilding brooch shall wet your breast
The rain-fresh goldenrod

Oh, never this whelming east wind swells
 But it seems like the sea's return
To the ancient lands where it left the shells
 Before the age of the fern,
And it seems like the time when after doubt
 Our love came back amain
Oh, come forth into the storm and rout
 And be my love in the rain.

OCTOBER

O hushed October morning mild,
Thy leaves have ripened to the fall,
To-morrow's wind, if it be wild,
Should waste them all
The crows above the forest call,
To-morrow they may form and go
O hushed October morning mild,
Begin the hours of this day slow
Make the day seem to us less brief
Hearts not averse to being beguiled,
Beguile us in the way you know
Release one leaf at break of day,
At noon release another leaf,
One from our trees, one far away
Retard the sun with gentle mist,
Enchant the land with amethyst
Slow, slow!
For the grapes' sake, if they were all,
Whose leaves already are burnt with frost,
Whose clustered fruit must else be lost—
For the grapes' sake along the wall

RELUCTANCE

Out through the fields and the woods
And over the walls I have wended,
I have climbed the hills of view
And looked at the world, and descended,
I have come by the highway home,
And lo, it is ended

The leaves are all dead on the ground,
Save those that the oak is keeping
To ravel them one by one
And let them go scraping and creeping
Out over the crusted snow,
When others are sleeping

And the dead leaves lie huddled and still,
No longer blown hither and thither,
The last lone aster is gone,
The flowers of the witch-hazel wither,
The heart is still aching to seek,
But the feet question 'Whither?'

Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or a season?

North of Boston

MENDING WALL

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast
The work of hunters is another thing
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made
But at spring mending-time we find them there
I let my neighbour know beyond the hill,
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again
We keep the wall between us as we go
To each the boulders that have fallen to each
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side It comes to little more
There where it is we do not need the wall
He is all pine and I am apple orchard
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbours

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head
'*Why* do they make good neighbours? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

THE DEATH OF THE HIRED MAN

Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table
Waiting for Warren When she heard his step,
She ran on tip-toe down the darkened passage
To meet him in the doorway with the news
And put him on his guard 'Silas is back'
She pushed him outward with her through the door
And shut it after her 'Be kind,' she said
She took the market things from Warren's arms
And set them on the porch, then drew him down
To sit beside her on the wooden steps

'When was I ever anything but kind to him?
But I'll not have the fellow back,' he said
'I told him so last haying, didn't I?
"If he left then," I said, "that ended it"
What good is he? Who else will harbour him
At his age for the little he can do?
What help he is there's no depending on.
Off he goes always when I need him most.
"He thinks he ought to earn a little pay,
Enough at least to buy tobacco with,
So he won't have to beg and be beholden"
"All right," I say, "I can't afford to pay
Any fixed wages, though I wish I could"
"Someone else can" "Then someone else will have to"
I shouldn't mind his bettering himself

If that was what it was You can be certain,
When he begins like that, there's someone at him
Trying to coax him off with pocket-money,—
In haying time, when any help is scarce
In winter he comes back to us I'm done '

'Sh! not so loud he'll hear you,' Mary said.

'I want him to he'll have to soon or late '

'He's worn out He's asleep beside the stove
When I came up from Rowe's I found him here,
Huddled against the barn-door fast asleep,
A miserable sight, and frightening, too—
You needn't smile—I didn't recognise him—
I wasn't looking for him—and he's changed
Wait till you see '

'Where did you say he'd been?'

'He didn't say I dragged him to the house,
And gave him tea and tried to make him smoke.
I tried to make him talk about his travels.
Nothing would do he just kept nodding off.'

'What did he say? Did he say anything?'

'But little.'

'Anything? Mary, confess
He said he'd come to ditch the meadow for me'

'Warren!'

'But did he? I just want to know'

'Of course he did What would you have him say?
Surely you wouldn't grudge the poor old man
Some humble way to save his self-respect
He added, if you really care to know,
He meant to clear the upper pasture, too
That sounds like something you have heard before?
Warren, I wish you could have heard the way
He jumbled everything I stopped to look
Two or three times—he made me feel so queer—
To see if he was talking in his sleep
He ran on Harold Wilson—you remember—
The boy you had in haying four years since
He's finished school, and teaching in his college
Silas declares you'll have to get him back
He says they two will make a team for work
Between them they will lay this farm as smooth!
The way he mixed that in with other things.
He thinks young Wilson a likely lad, though daft
On education—you know how they fought
All through July under the blazing sun,
Silas up on the cart to build the load,
Harold along beside to pitch it on'

'Yes, I took care to keep well out of earshot'

'Well, those days trouble Silas like a dream
You wouldn't think they would How some things
linger!
Harold's young college boy's assurance piqued him.
After so many years he still keeps finding
Good arguments he sees he might have used
I sympathise I know just how it feels
To think of the right thing to say too late
Harold's associated in his mind with Latin
He asked me what I thought of Harold's saying
He studied Latin like the violin
Because he liked it—that an argument!
He said he couldn't make the boy believe
He could find water witha hazel prong—
Which showed how much good school had ever
done him
He wanted to go over that But most of all
He thinks if he could have another chance
To teach him how to build a load of hay—'

'I know, that's Silas' one accomplishment.
He bundles every forkful in its place,
And tags and numbers it for future reference,
So he can find and easily dislodge it
In the unloading Silas does that well
He takes it out in bunches like big birds' nests.
You never see him standing on the hay
He's trying to lift, straining to lift himself.

'He thinks if he could teach him that, he'd be
Some good perhaps to someone in the world.
He hates to see a boy the fool of books
Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,
And nothing to look backward to with pride,
And nothing to look forward to with hope,
So now and never any different '

Part of a moon was falling down the west,
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills
Its light poured softly in her lap She saw it
And spread her apron to it She put out her hand
Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,
As if she played unheard some tenderness
That wrought on him beside her in the night
'Warren,' she said, 'he has come home to die
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time.'

'Home,' he mocked gently

'Yes, what else but home?
It all depends on what you mean by home
Of course he's nothing to us, any more
Than was the hound that came a stranger to us
Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail '

'Home is the place where, when you have to go
there,
They have to take you in.

'I should have called it
Something you somehow haven't to deserve '

Warren leaned out and took a step or two,
Picked up a little stick, and brought it back
And broke it in his hand and tossed it by
'Silas has better claim on us you think
Than on his brother? Thirteen little miles
As the road winds would bring him to his door.
Silas has walked that far no doubt to-day
Why didn't he go there? His brother's rich,
A somebody—director in the bank '

'He never told us that '

'We know it though '

'I think his brother ought to help, of course
I'll see to that if there is need He ought of right
To take him in, and might be willing to—
He may be better than appearances
But have some pity on Silas Do you think
If he had any pride in claiming kin
Or anything he looked for from his brother,
He'd keep so still about him all this time?'

'I wonder what's between them '

'I can tell you
Silas is what he is—we wouldn't mind him—

But just the kind that kinsfolk can't abide
He never did a thing so very bad
He don't know why he isn't quite as good
As anybody Worthless though he is,
He won't be made ashamed to please his brother '

'*I* can't think Si ever hurt anyone '

'No, but he hurt my heart the way he lay
And rolled his old head on that sharp-edged
 chairback
He wouldn't let me put him on the lounge
You must go in and see what you can do
I made the bed up for him there to-night
You'll be surprised at him—how much he's broken
His working days are done, I'm sure of it '

'I'd not be in a hurry to say that '

'I haven't been Go, look, see for yourself
But, Warren, please remember how it is
He's come to help you ditch the meadow
He has a plan You mustn't laugh at him
He may not speak of it, and then he may
I'll sit and see if that small sailing cloud
Will hit or miss the moon '

It hit the moon
Then there were three there, making a dim row,
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she

'Warren returned—too soon, it seemed to her,
Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited

'Warren?' she questioned

'Dead,' was all he answered

THE MOUNTAIN

The mountain held the town as in a shadow
I saw so much before I slept there once
I noticed that I missed stars in the west,
Where its black body cut into the sky
Near me it seemed I felt it like a wall
Behind which I was sheltered from a wind
And yet between the town and it I found,
When I walked forth at dawn to see new things,
Were fields, a river, and beyond, more fields
The river at the time was fallen away,
And made a widespread brawl on cobble-stones,
But the signs showed what it had done in spring
Good grass-land gullied out, and in the grass
Ridges of sand, and driftwood stripped of bark
I crossed the river and swung round the mountain
And there I met a man who moved so slow
With white-faced oxen in a heavy cart,
It seemed no harm to stop him altogether

'What town is this?' I asked

'This? Lunenburg'

Then I was wrong the town of my sojourn,
Beyond the bridge, was not that of the mountain,
But only felt at night its shadowy presence
'Where is your village? Very far from here?'

'There is no village—only scattered farms
We were but sixty voters last election
We can't in nature grow to many more
That thing takes all the room!' He moved his goad
The mountain stood there to be pointed at
Pasture ran up the side a little way,
And then there was a wall of trees with trunks,
After that only tops of trees, and cliffs
Imperfectly concealed among the leaves
A dry ravine emerged from under boughs
Into the pasture

'That looks like a path
Is that the way to reach the top from here?—
Not for this morning, but some other time
I must be getting back to breakfast now'

'I don't advise your trying from this side
There is no proper path, but those that *have*
Been up, I understand, have climbed from Ladd's
That's five miles back You can't mistake the place
They logged it there last winter some way up
I'd take you, but I'm bound the other way'

'You've never climbed it?'

'I've been on the sides,
Deer-hunting and trout-fishing There's a brook
That starts up on it somewhere—I've heard say
Right on the top, tip-top—a curious thing

But what would interest you about the brook,
It's always cold in summer, warm in winter
One of the great sights going is to see
It steam in winter like an ox's breath,
Until the bushes all along its banks
Are inch-deep with the frosty spines and bristles—
You know the kind Then let the sun shine on it!'

'There ought to be a view around the world
From such a mountain—if it isn't wooded
Clear to the top ' I saw through leafy screens
Great granite terraces in sun and shadow,
Shelves one could rest a knee on getting up—
With depths behind him sheer a hundred feet
Or turn and sit on and look out and down,
With little ferns in crevices at his elbow.

'As to that I can't say But there's the spring,
Right on the summit, almost like a fountain
That ought to be worth seeing '

'If it's there
You never saw it?'

'I guess there's no doubt
About its being there I never saw it
It may not be right on the very top
It wouldn't have to be a long way down
To have some head of water from above,
And a *good distance* down might not be noticed

By anyone who'd come a long way up
One time I asked a fellow climbing it
To look and tell me later how it was '

'What did he say?'

'He said there was a lake
Somewhere in Ireland on a mountain top '

'But a lake's different What about the spring?'

'He never got up high enough to see
That's why I don't advise your trying this side
He tried this side I've always meant to go
And look myself, but you know how it is
It doesn't seem so much to climb a mountain
You've worked around the foot of all your life
What would I do? Go in my overalls,
With a big stick, the same as when the cows
Haven't come down to the bars at milking time?
Or with a shotgun for a stray black bear?
'Twouldn't seem real to climb for climbing it '

'I shouldn't climb it if I didn't want to—
Not for the sake of climbing What's its name?'

'We call it Hor I don't know if that's right '

'Can one walk around it? Would it be too far?'

'You can drive round and keep in Lunenburg,
But it's as much as ever you can do,
The boundary lines keep in so close to it
Hor is the township, and the township's Hor—
And a few houses sprinkled round the foot,
Like boulders broken off the upper cliff,
Rolled out a little farther than the rest '

'Warm in December, cold in June, you say?'

'I don't suppose the water's changed at all
You and I know enough to know it's warm
Compared with cold, and cold compared with warm
But all the fun's in how you say a thing '

'You've lived here all your life?'

'Ever since Hor
Was no bigger than a—' What, I did not hear
He drew the oxen toward him with light touches
Of his slim goad on nose and offside flank,
Gave them their marching orders and was moving.

A HUNDRED COLLARS

Lancaster bore him—such a little town,
Such a great man It doesn't see him often
Of late years, though he keeps the old homestead
And sends the children down there with their mothe
To run wild in the summer—a little wild
Sometimes he joins them for a day or two
And sees old friends he somehow can't get near
They meet him in the general store at night,
Pre-occupied with formidable mail,
Rifling a printed letter as he talks
They seem afraid He wouldn't have it so
Though a great scholar, he's a democrat,
If not at heart, at least on principle
Lately when coming up to Lancaster,
His train being late, he missed another train
And had four hours to wait at Woodsville Junction
After eleven o'clock at night Too tired
To think of sitting such an ordeal out,
He turned to the hotel to find a bed

'No room,' the night clerk said 'Unless—'

Woodsville's a place of shrieks and wandering
And cars that shock and rattle—and *one* hotel

You say "unless" '

'Unless you wouldn't mind
Sharing a room with someone else'

'Who is it?'

'A man'

'So I should hope What kind of man?'

'I know him he's all right A man's a man
Separate beds, of course, you understand'
The night clerk blinked his eyes and dared him on.

Who's that man sleeping in the office chair?
Has he had the refusal of my chance?'

'He was afraid of being robbed or murdered
What do you say?'

'I'll have to have a bed'

The night clerk led him up three flights of stairs
And down a narrow passage full of doors,
At the last one of which he knocked and entered.
'Lafe, here's a fellow wants to share your room'

'Show him this way I'm not afraid of him
I'm not so drunk I can't take care of myself.'

The night clerk clapped a bedstead on the foot
'This will be yours Good-night,' he said, and went

'Lafe was the name, I think?'

'Yes, *Lay*fayette
You got it the first time. And yours?'

'Magoon
Doctor Magoon'

'A Doctor?'

'Well, a teacher'

'Professor Square-the-circle-till-you're-tired?
Hold on, there's something I don't think of now
That I had on my mind to ask the first
Man that knew anything I happened in with
I'll ask you later—don't let me forget it'

The Doctor looked at Lafe and looked away.
A man? A brute Naked above the waist,
He sat there creased and shining in the light,
Fumbling the buttons in a well-starched shirt
'I'm moving into a size-larger shirt
I've felt mean lately; mean's no name for it
I just found what the matter was to-night
I've been a-choking like a nursery tree
When it outgrows the wire band of its name tag

I blamed it on the hot spell we've been having
'Twas nothing but my foolish hanging back,
Not liking to own up I'd grown a size
Number eighteen this is What size do you wear?'

The Doctor caught his throat convulsively
'Oh—ah—fourteen—fourteen.'

'Fourteen! You say so!
I can remember when I wore fourteen
And come to think I must have back at home
More than a hundred collars, size fourteen
Too bad to waste them all You ought to have them
They're yours and welcome; let me send them to you
What makes you stand there on one leg like that?
You're not much furtherer than where Kike left you
You act as if you wished you hadn't come
Sit down or lie down, friend, you make me nervous'

The Doctor made a subdued dash for it,
And propped himself at bay against a pillow

'Not that way, with your shoes on Kike's white bed
You can't rest that way. Let me pull your shoes off'

'Don't touch me, please—I say, don't touch me, please
I'll not be put to bed by you, my man'

'Just as you say Have it your own way then
"My man" is it? You talk like a professor
Speaking of who's afraid of who, however,
I'm thinking I have more to lose than you
If anything should happen to be wrong
Who wants to cut your number fourteen throat!
Let's have a show down as an evidence
Of good faith There is ninety dollars
Come, if you're not afraid '

*'I'*m not afraid.
There's five that's all I carry '

'I can search you?
Where are you moving over to? Stay still
You'd better tuck your money under you
And sleep on it the way I always do
When I'm with people I don't trust at night '

Will you believe me if I put it there
Right on the counterpane—that I do trust you?'

'You'd say so, Mister Man —I'm a collector
My ninety isn't mine—you won't think that
I pick it up a dollar at a time
All round the country for the *Weekly News,*
Published in Bow You know the *Weekly News*

'Known it since I was young '

'Then you know me
Now we are getting on together—talking
I'm sort of Something for it at the front
My business is to find what people want
They pay for it, and so they ought to have it
Fairbanks, he says to me—he's editor—
"Feel out the public sentiment"—he says
A good deal comes on me when all is said
The only trouble is we disagree
In politics I'm Vermont Democrat—
You know what that is, sort of double-dyed,
The *News* has always been Republican
Fairbanks, he says to me, "Help us this year,"
Meaning by us their ticket "No," I says,
"I can't and won't You've been in long enough
It's time you turned around and boosted us
You'll have to pay me more than ten a week
If I'm expected to elect Bill Taft
I doubt if I could do it anyway" '

'You seem to shape the paper's policy—'

'You see I'm in with everybody, know 'em all
I almost know their farms as well as they do'

'You drive around? It must be pleasant work'

'It's business, but I can't say it's not fun
What I like best's the lay of different farms,

Coming out on them from a stretch of woods,
Or over a hill or round a sudden corner
I like to find folks getting out in spring,
Raking the dooryard, working near the house
Later they get out further in the fields
Everything's shut sometimes except the barn,
The family's all away in some back meadow
There's a hay load a-coming—when it comes
And later still they all get driven in
The fields are stripped to lawn, the garden patches
Stripped to bare ground, the maple trees
To whips and poles There's nobody about
The chimney, though, keeps up a good brisk smoking
And I lie back and ride I take the reins
Only when someone's coming, and the mare
Stops when she likes I tell her when to go
I've spoiled Jemima in more ways than one.
She's got so she turns in at every house
As if she had some sort of curvature,
No matter if I have no errand there
She thinks I'm sociable I maybe am
It's seldom I get down except for meals, though.
Folks entertain me from the kitchen doorstep,
All in a family row down to the youngest'

'One would suppose they might not be as glad
To see you as you are to see them'

'Oh,
Because I want their dollar? I don't want

Anything they've not got I never dun
I'm there, and they can pay me if they like.
I go nowhere on purpose I happen by
Sorry there is no cup to give you a drink
I drink out of the bottle—not your style
Mayn't I offer you—?'

'No, no, no, thank you.'

'Just as you say Here's looking at you then —
And now I'm leaving you a little while
You'll rest easier when I'm gone, perhaps—
Lie down—let yourself go and get some sleep
But first—let's see—what was I going to ask you?
Those collars—who shall I address them to,
Suppose you aren't awake when I come back?'

'Really, friend, I can't let you You—may need them.'

'Not till I shrink, when they'll be out of style '

'But really I—I have so many collars '

'I don't know who I rather would have have them
They're only turning yellow where they are
But you're the doctor as the saying is
I'll put the light out Don't you wait for me
I've just begun the night You get some sleep
I'll knock so-fashion and peep round the door
When I come back so you'll know who it is

There's nothing I'm afraid of like scared people
I don't want you should shoot me in the head
What am I doing carrying off this bottle?
There now, you get some sleep '

He shut the door
The Doctor slid a little down the pillow

HOME BURIAL

He saw her from the bottom of the stairs
Before she saw him She was starting down,
Looking back over her shoulder at some fear
She took a doubtful step and then undid it
To raise herself and look again He spoke
Advancing toward her 'What is it you see
From up there always—for I want to know'
She turned and sank upon her skirts at that,
And her face changed from terrified to dull
He said to gain time 'What is it you see,'
Mounting until she cowered under him
'I will find out now—you must tell me, dear'
She, in her place, refused him any help
With the least stiffening of her neck and silence
She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see,
Blind creature, and a while he didn't see
But at last he murmured, 'Oh,' and again, 'Oh'

'What is it—what?' she said

'Just that I see.'

'You don't,' she challenged 'Tell me what it is'

'The wonder is I didn't see at once
I never noticed it from here before
I must be wonted to it—that's the reason.

The little graveyard where my people are!
So small the window frames the whole of it
Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?
There are three stones of slate and one of marble,
Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight
On the sidehill We haven't to mind *those*
But I understand it is not the stones,
But the child's mound—'

'Don't, don't, don't, don't,' she cried

She withdrew shrinking from beneath his arm
That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs,
And turned on him with such a daunting look,
He said twice over before he knew himself
'Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?'

'Not you! Oh, where's my hat? Oh, I don't need it!
I must get out of here I must get air
I don't know rightly whether any man can '

'Amy! Don't go to someone else this time
Listen to me I won't come down the stairs '
He sat and fixed his chin between his fists
'There's something I should like to ask you, dear '

'You don't know how to ask it '

'Help me, then '

Her fingers moved the latch for all reply.

'My words are nearly always an offence
I don't know how to speak of anything
So as to please you But I might be taught
I should suppose I can't say I see how
A man must partly give up being a man
With women-folk We could have some arrangement
By which I'd bind myself to keep hands off
Anything special you're a-mind to name
Though I don't like such things 'twixt those that love
Two that don't love can't live together without them.
But two that do can't live together with them '
She moved the latch a little 'Don't—don't go
Don't carry it to someone else this time
Tell me about it if it's something human.
Let me into your grief I'm not so much
Unlike other folks as your standing there
Apart would make me out Give me my chance.
I do think, though, you overdo it a little
What was it brought you up to think it the thing
To take your mother-loss of a first child
So inconsolably—in the face of love
You'd think his memory might be satisfied—'

'There you go sneering now!'

'I'm not, I'm not!
You make me angry. I'll come down to you

God, what a woman! And it's come to this,
A man can't speak of his own child that's dead'

'You can't because you don't know how to speak
If you had any feelings, you that dug
With your own hand—how could you?—his little
grave,
I saw you from that very window there,
Making the gravel leap and leap in air,
Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly
And roll back down the mound beside the hole
I thought, Who is that man? I didn't know you
And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs
To look again, and still your spade kept lifting
Then you came in I heard your rumbling voice
Out in the kitchen, and I don't know why,
But I went near to see with my own eyes
You could sit there with the stains on your shoes
Of the fresh earth from your own baby's grave
And talk about your everyday concerns
You had stood the spade up against the wall
Outside there in the entry, for I saw it'

'I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed
I'm cursed God, if I don't believe I'm cursed'

'I can repeat the very words you were saying
"Three foggy mornings and one rainy day
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build"
Think of it, talk like that at such a time!

What had how long it takes a birch to rot
To do with what was in the darkened parlour
You *couldn't* care! The nearest friends can go
With anyone to death, comes so far short
They might as well not try to go at all
No, from the time when one is sick to death,
One is alone, and he dies more alone
Friends make pretence of following to the grave,
But before one is in it, their minds are turned
And making the best of their way back to life
And living people, and things they understand
But the world's evil I won't have grief so
If I can change it Oh, I won't, I won't!'

'There you have said it all and you feel better
You won't go now You're crying Close the door
The heart's gone out of it why keep it up
Amy! There's someone coming down the road!'

'*You*—oh, you think the talk is all I must go—
Somewhere out of this house How can I make you—'

'If—you—do!' She was opening the door wider
'Where do you mean to go? First tell me that
I'll follow and bring you back by force I *will!*—'

THE BLACK COTTAGE

We chanced in passing by that afternoon
To catch it in a sort of special picture
Among tar-banded ancient cherry trees,
Set well back from the road in rank lodged grass,
The little cottage we were speaking of,
A front with just a door between two windows,
Fresh painted by the shower a velvet black
We paused, the minister and I, to look
He made as if to hold it at arm's length
Or put the leaves aside that framed it in
'Pretty,' he said 'Come in No one will care'
The path was a vague parting in the grass
That led us to a weathered window-sill
We pressed our faces to the pane 'You see,' he said,
'Everything's as she left it when she died
Her sons won't sell the house or the things in it
They say they mean to come and summer here
Where they were boys They haven't come this year.
They live so far away—one is out west—
It will be hard for them to keep their word
Anyway they won't have the place disturbed'
A buttoned hair-cloth lounge spread scrolling arms
Under a crayon portrait on the wall,
Done sadly from an old daguerreotype
'That was the father as he went to war
She always, when she talked about the war,
Sooner or later came and leaned, half knelt

Against the lounge beside it, though I doubt
If such unlifelike lines kept power to stir
Anything in her after all the years
He fell at Gettysburg or Fredericksburg,
I ought to know—it makes a difference which
Fredericksburg wasn't Gettysburg, of course
But what I'm getting to is how forsaken
A little cottage this has always seemed,
Since she went more than ever, but before—
I don't mean altogether by the lives
That had gone out of it, the father first,
Then the two sons, till she was left alone.
(Nothing could draw her after those two sons
She valued the considerate neglect
She had at some cost taught them after years)
I mean by the world's having passed it by—
As we almost got by this afternoon
It always seems to me a sort of mark
To measure how far fifty years have brought us.
Why not sit down if you are in no haste?
These doorsteps seldom have a visitor
The warping boards pull out their own old nails
With none to tread and put them in their place
She had her own idea of things, the old lady.
And she liked talk She had seen Garrison
And Whittier, and had her story of them
One wasn't long in learning that she thought
Whatever else the Civil War was for,
It wasn't just to keep the States together,
Nor just to free the slaves, though it did both.

She wouldn't have believed those ends enough
To have given outright for them all she gave
Her giving somehow touched the principle
That all men are created free and equal
And to hear her quaint phrases—so removed
From the world's view to-day of all those things
That's a hard mystery of Jefferson's
What did he mean? Of course the easy way
Is to decide it simply isn't true
It may not be I heard a fellow say so
But never mind, the Welshman got it planted
Where it will trouble us a thousand years
Each age will have to reconsider it
You couldn't tell her what the West was saying,
And what the South to her serene belief
She had some art of hearing and yet not
Hearing the latter wisdom of the world
White was the only race she ever knew
Black she had scarcely seen, and yellow never
But how could they be made so very unlike
By the same hand working in the same stuff?
She had supposed the war decided that
What are you going to do with such a person?
Strange how such innocence gets its own way
I shouldn't be surprised if in this world
It were the force that would at last prevail
Do you know but for her there was a time
When to please younger members of the church,
Or rather say non-members in the church,
Whom we all have to think of nowadays,

I would have changed the Creed a very little?
Not that she ever had to ask me not to,
It never got so far as that, but the bare thought
Of her old tremulous bonnet in the pew,
And of her half asleep was too much for me
Why, I might wake her up and startle her
It was the words "descended into Hades"
That seemed too pagan to our liberal youth
You know they suffered from a general onslaught
And well, if they weren't true why keep right on
Saying them like the heathen? We could drop them
Only—there was the bonnet in the pew
Such a phrase couldn't have meant much to her
But suppose she had missed it from the Creed
As a child misses the unsaid Good-night,
And falls asleep with heartache—how should *I* feel?
I'm just as glad she made me keep hands off,
For, dear me, why abandon a belief
Merely because it ceases to be true
Cling to it long enough, and not a doubt
It will turn true again, for so it goes
Most of the change we think we see in life
Is due to truths being in and out of favour
As I sit here, and oftentimes, I wish
I could be monarch of a desert land
I could devote and dedicate forever
To the truths we keep coming back and back to
So desert it would have to be, so walled
By mountain ranges half in summer snow,
No one would covet it or think it worth

The pains of conquering to force change on
Scattered oases where men dwelt, but mostly
Sand dunes held loosely in tamarisk
Blown over and over themselves in idleness
Sand grains should sugar in the natal dew
The babe born to the desert, the sand storm
Retard mid-waste my cowering caravans—
There are bees in this wall ' He struck the clapboards,
Fierce heads looked out, small bodies pivoted
We rose to go Sunset blazed on the windows

BLUEBERRIES

'You ought to have seen what I saw on my way
To the village, through Patterson's pasture to-day:
Blueberries as big as the end of your thumb,
Real sky-blue, and heavy, and ready to drum
In the cavernous pail of the first one to come!
And all ripe together, not some of them green
And some of them ripe! You ought to have seen!'

'I don't know what part of the pasture you mean'

'You know where they cut off the woods—let me see—
It was two years ago—or no!—can it be
No longer than that?—and the following fall
The fire ran and burned it all up but the wall'

'Why, there hasn't been time for the bushes to grow.
That's always the way with the blueberries, though
There may not have been the ghost of a sign
Of them anywhere under the shade of the pine,
But get the pine out of the way, you may burn
The pasture all over until not a fern
Or grass-blade is left, not to mention a stick,
And presto, they're up all around you as thick
And hard to explain as a conjuror's trick'

'It must be on charcoal they fatten their fruit.
I taste in them sometimes the flavour of soot.

And after all really they're ebony skinned
The blue's but a mist from the breath of the wind,
A tarnish that goes at a touch of the hand,
And less than the tan with which pickers are tanned '

'Does Patterson know what he has, do you think?'

'He may and not care and so leave the chewink
To gather them for him—you know what he is
He won't make the fact that they're rightfully his
An excuse for keeping us other folk out '

'I wonder you didn't see Loren about '

'The best of it was that I did Do you know,
I was just getting through what the field had to show
And over the wall and into the road,
When who should come by, with a democrat-load
Of all the young chattering Lorens alive,
But Loren, the fatherly, out for a drive '

'He saw you, then? What did he do? Did he frown?'

'He just kept nodding his head up and down
You know how politely he always goes by
But he thought a big thought—I could tell by his eye—
Which being expressed, might be this in effect
'I have left those there berries, I shrewdly suspect,
To ripen too long I am greatly to blame " '

'He's a thriftier person than some I could name'

'He seems to be thrifty, and hasn't he need,
With the mouths of all those young Lorens to feed?
He has brought them all up on wild berries, they say,
Like birds They store a great many away
They eat them the year round, and those they don't eat
They sell in the store and buy shoes for their feet'

'Who cares what they say? It's a nice way to live,
Just taking what Nature is willing to give,
Not forcing her hand with harrow and plow'

'I wish you had seen his perpetual bow—
And the air of the youngsters! Not one of them turned,
And they looked so solemn-absurdly concerned'

'I wish I knew half what the flock of them know
Of where all the berries and other things grow,
Cranberries in bogs and raspberries on top
Of the boulder-strewn mountain, and when they will crop
I met them one day and each had a flower
Stuck into his berries as fresh as a shower,
Some strange kind—they told me it hadn't a name'

'I've told you how once not long after we came,
I almost provoked poor Loren to mirth
By going to him of all people on earth

To ask if he knew any fruit to be had
For the picking The rascal, he said he'd be glad
To tell if he knew But the year had been bad
There *had* been some berries—but those were all gone.
He didn't say where they had been He went on
"I'm sure—I'm sure"—as polite as could be
He spoke to his wife in the door, "Let me see,
Mame, *we* don't know any good berrying place?"
It was all he could do to keep a straight face '

'If he thinks all the fruit that grows wild is for him,
He'll find he's mistaken See here, for a whim,
We'll pick in the Pattersons' pasture this year
We'll go in the morning, that is, if it's clear,
And the sun shines out warm the vines must be wet
It's so long since I picked I almost forget
How we used to pick berries we took one look round,
Then sank out of sight like trolls underground,
And saw nothing more of each other, or heard,
Unless when you said I was keeping a bird
Away from its nest, and I said it was you
"Well, one of us is " For complaining it flew
Around and around us And then for a while
We picked, till I feared you had wandered a mile,
And I thought I had lost you. I lifted a shout
Too loud for the distance you were, it turned out,
For when you made answer, your voice was as low
As talking—you stood up beside me, you know.'

'We sha'n't have the place to ourselves to enjoy—

Not likely, when all the young Lorens deploy
They'll be there to-morrow, or even to-night
They won't be too friendly—they may be polite—
To people they look on as having no right
To pick where they're picking But we won't com-
plain
You ought to have seen how it looked in the rain,
The fruit mixed with water in layers of leaves,
Like two kinds of jewels, a vision for thieves '

I didn't make you know how glad I was
To have you come and camp here on our land.
I promised myself to get down some day
And see the way you lived, but I don't know!
With a houseful of hungry men to feed
I guess you'd find It seems to me
I can't express my feelings any more
Than I can raise my voice or want to lift
My hand (oh, I can lift it when I have to)
Did ever you feel so? I hope you never
It's got so I don't even know for sure
Whether I *am* glad, sorry, or anything
There's nothing but a voice-like left inside
That seems to tell me how I ought to feel,
And would feel if I wasn't all gone wrong
You take the lake I look and look at it
I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water
I stand and make myself repeat out loud
The advantages it has, so long and narrow,
Like a deep piece of some old running river
Cut short off at both ends It lies five miles
Straight away through the mountain notch
From the sink window where I wash the plates,
And all our storms come up toward the house,
Drawing the slow waves whiter and whiter and whiter
It took my mind off doughnuts and soda biscuit

To step outdoors and take the water dazzle
A sunny morning, or take the rising wind
About my face and body and through my wrapper,
When a storm threatened from the Dragon's Den,
And a cold chill shivered across the lake
I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water,
Our Willoughby! How did you hear of it?
I expect, though, everyone's heard of it
In a book about ferns? Listen to that!
You let things more like feathers regulate
Your going and coming And you like it here?
I can see how you might But I don't know!
It would be different if more people came,
For then there would be business As it is,
The cottages Len built, sometimes we rent them,
Sometimes we don't We've a good piece of shore
That ought to be worth something, and may yet
But I don't count on it as much as Len
He looks on the bright side of everything,
Including me He thinks I'll be all right
With doctoring But it's not medicine—
Lowe is the only doctor's dared to say so—
It's rest I want—there, I have said it out—
From cooking meals for hungry hired men
And washing dishes after them—from doing
Things over and over that just won't stay done.
By good rights I ought not to have so much
Put on me, but there seems no other way
Len says one steady pull more ought to do it.
He says the best way out is always through

And I agree to that, or in so far
As that I can see no way out but through—
Leastways for me—and then they'll be convinced
It's not that Len don't want the best for me
It was his plan our moving over in
Beside the lake from where that day I showed you
We used to live—ten miles from anywhere
We didn't change without some sacrifice,
But Len went at it to make up the loss
His work's a man's, of course, from sun to sun,
But he works when he works as hard as I do—
Though there's small profit in comparisons
(Women and men will make them all the same)
But work ain't all Len undertakes too much
He's into everything in town This year
It's highways, and he's got too many men
Around him to look after that make waste
They take advantage of him shamefully,
And proud, too, of themselves for doing so
We have four here to board, great good-for-nothings,
Sprawling about the kitchen with their talk
While I fry their bacon Much they care!
No more put out in what they do or say
Than if I wasn't in the room at all
Coming and going all the time, they are
I don't learn what their names are, let alone
Their characters, or whether they are safe
To have inside the house with doors unlocked
I'm not afraid of them, though, if they're not
Afraid of me There's two can play at that

I have my fancies it runs in the family
My father's brother wasn't right They kept him
Locked up for years back there at the old farm
I've been away once—yes, I've been away
The State Asylum I was prejudiced,
I wouldn't have sent anyone of mine there,
You know the old idea—the only asylum
Was the poorhouse, and those who could afford,
Rather than send their folks to such a place,
Kept them at home, and it does seem more human
But it's not so the place is the asylum
There they have every means proper to do with,
And you aren't darkening other people's lives—
Worse than no good to them, and they no good
To you in your condition, you can't know
Affection or the want of it in that state
I've heard too much of the old-fashioned way
My father's brother, he went mad quite young
Some thought he had been bitten by a dog,
Because his violence took on the form
Of carrying his pillow in his teeth,
But it's more likely he was crossed in love,
Or so the story goes It was some girl
Anyway all he talked about was love
They soon saw he would do someone a mischief
If he wa'n't kept strict watch of, and it ended
In father's building him a sort of cage,
Or room within a room, of hickory poles,
Like stanchions in the barn, from floor to ceiling
A narrow passage all the way around

Anything they put in for furniture
He'd tear to pieces, even a bed to lie on
So they made the place comfortable with straw,
Like a beast's stall, to ease their consciences
Of course they had to feed him without dishes
They tried to keep him clothed, but he paraded
With his clothes on his arm—all of his clothes
Cruel—it sounds I 'spose they did the best
They knew And just when he was at the height,
Father and mother married, and mother came,
A bride, to help take care of such a creature,
And accommodate her young life to his
That was what marrying father meant to her
She had to lie and hear love things made dreadful
By his shouts in the night He'd shout and shout
Until the strength was shouted out of him,
And his voice died down slowly from exhaustion
He'd pull his bars apart like bow and bowstring,
And let them go and make them twang until
His hands had worn them smooth as any oxbow
And then he'd crow as if he thought that child's play
The only fun he had I've heard them say, though,
They found a way to put a stop to it
He was before my time—I never saw him,
But the pen stayed exactly as it was
There in the upper chamber in the ell,
A sort of catch-all full of attic clutter
I often think of the smooth hickory bars
It got so I would say—you know, half fooling—
'It's time I took my turn upstairs in jail'—
Just as you will till it becomes a habit

No wonder I was glad to get away
Mind you, I waited till Len said the word
I didn't want the blame if things went wrong
I was glad though, no end, when we moved out,
And I looked to be happy, and I was,
As I said, for a while—but I don't know!
Somehow the change wore out like a prescription
And there's more to it than just window-views
And living by a lake I'm past such help—
Unless Len took the notion, which he won't,
And I won't ask him—it's not sure enough
I 'spose I've got to go the road I'm going
Other folks have to, and why shouldn't I?
I almost think if I could do like you,
Drop everything and live out on the ground—
But it might be, come night, I shouldn't like it,
Or a long rain I should soon get enough,
And be glad of a good roof overhead
I've lain awake thinking of you, I'll warrant,
More than you have yourself, some of these nights
The wonder was the tents weren't snatched away
From over you as you lay in your beds
I haven't courage for a risk like that
Bless you, of course, you're keeping me from work,
But the thing of it is, I need to *be* kept
There's work enough to do—there's always that,
But behind's behind The worst that you can do
Is set me back a little more behind
I sha'n't catch up in this world, anyway
I'd *rather* you'd not go unless you must

AFTER APPLE-PICKING

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough
But I am done with apple-picking now
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples I am drowsing off
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass
It melted, and I let it fall and break
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.

For I have had too much
Of apple-picking I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep

THE CODE

There were three in the meadow by the brook
Gathering up windrows, piling cocks of hay,
With an eye always lifted toward the west
Where an irregular sun-bordered cloud
Darkly advanced with a perpetual dagger
Flickering across its bosom Suddenly
One helper, thrusting pitchfork in the ground,
Marched himself off the field and home One stayed
The town-bred farmer failed to understand

'What is there wrong?'

'Something you just now said'

'What did I say?'

'About our taking pains'

'To cock the hay?—because it's going to shower?
I said that more than half an hour ago
I said it to myself as much as you'

'You didn't know But James is one big fool
He thought you meant to find fault with his work
That's what the average farmer would have meant
James would take time, of course, to chew it over
Before he acted he's just got round to act'

'He is a fool if that's the way he takes me '

'Don't let it bother you You've found out something
The hand that knows his business won't be told
To do work better or faster—those two things
I'm as particular as anyone
Most likely I'd have served you just the same
But I know you don't understand our ways
You were just talking what was in your mind,
What was in all our minds, and you weren't hinting
Tell you a story of what happened once
I was up here in Salem at a man's
Named Sanders with a gang of four or five
Doing the haying No one liked the boss
He was one of the kind sports call a spider,
All wiry arms and legs that spread out wavy
From a humped body nigh as big's a biscuit
But work! that man could work, especially
If by so doing he could get more work
Out of his hired help I'm not denying
He was hard on himself I couldn't find
That he kept any hours—not for himself
Daylight and lantern-light were one to him
I've heard him pounding in the barn all night.
But what he liked was someone to encourage
Them that he couldn't lead he'd get behind
And drive, the way you can, you know, in mowing.
Keep at their heels and threaten to mow their legs off
I'd seen about enough of his bulling tricks
(We call that bulling) I'd been watching him

So when he paired off with me in the hayfield
To load the load, thinks I, Look out for trouble
I built the load and topped it off, old Sanders
Combed it down with a rake and says, "O K"
Everything went well till we reached the barn
With a big jag to empty in a bay
You understand that meant the easy job
For the man up on top of throwing *down*
The hay and rolling it off wholesale,
Where on a mow it would have been slow lifting
You wouldn't think a fellow'd need much urging
Under those circumstances, would you now?
But the old fool seizes his fork in both hands,
And looking up bewhiskered out of the pit,
Shouts like an army captain, "Let her come!"
Thinks I, D'ye mean it? "What was that you said?"
I asked out loud, so's there'd be no mistake,
"Did you say, Let her come?" "Yes, let her come"
He said it over, but he said it softer
Never you say a thing like that to a man,
Not if he values what he is God, I'd as soon
Murdered him as left out his middle name
I'd built the load and knew right where to find it
Two or three forkfuls I picked lightly round for
Like meditating, and then I just dug in
And dumped the rackful on him in ten lots
I looked over the side once in the dust
And caught sight of him treading-water-like,
Keeping his head above "Damn ye," I says,

"That gets ye!" He squeaked like a squeezed rat
That was the last I saw or heard of him
I cleaned the rack and drove out to cool off
As I sat mopping hayseed from my neck,
And sort of waiting to be asked about it,
One of the boys sings out, "Where's the old man?'
"I left him in the barn under the hay
If ye want him, ye can go and dig him out "
They realized from the way I swobbed my neck
More than was needed something must be up
They headed for the barn, I stayed where I was
They told me afterward First they forked hay,
A lot of it, out into the barn floor
Nothing! They listened for him Not a rustle
I guess they thought I'd spiked him in the temple
Before I buried him, or I couldn't have managed
They excavated more "Go keep his wife
Out of the barn " Someone looked in a window,
And curse me if he wasn't in the kitchen
Slumped way down in a chair, with both his feet
Against the stove, the hottest day that summer
He looked so clean disgusted from behind
There was no one that dared to stir him up,
Or let him know that he was being looked at
Apparently I hadn't buried him
(I may have knocked him down), but my just trying
To bury him had hurt his dignity
He had gone to the house so's not to meet me
He kept away from us all afternoon

We tended to his hay We saw him out
After a while picking peas in his garden
He couldn't keep away from doing something '

'Weren't you relieved to find he wasn't dead?'

No! and yet I don't know—it's hard to say
I went about to kill him fair enough '

'You took an awkward way Did he discharge you?'

'Discharge me? No! He knew I did just right '

THE GENERATIONS OF MEN

A governor it was proclaimed this time,
When all who would come seeking in New Hampshire
Ancestral memories might come together
And those of the name Stark gathered in Bow,
A rock-strewn town where farming has fallen off,
And sprout-lands flourish where the axe has gone
Someone had literally run to earth
In an old cellar hole in a by-road
The origin of all the family there
Thence they were sprung, so numerous a tribe
That now not all the houses left in town
Made shift to shelter them without the help
Of here and there a tent in grove and orchard
They were at Bow, but that was not enough
Nothing would do but they must fix a day
To stand together on the crater's verge
That turned them on the world, and try to fathom
The past and get some strangeness out of it
But rain spoiled all The day began uncertain,
With clouds low trailing and moments of rain that misted
The young folk held some hope out to each other
Till well toward noon when the storm settled down
With a swish in the grass 'What if the others
Are there,' they said 'It isn't going to rain'
Only one from a farm not far away

Strolled thither, not expecting he would find
Anyone else, but out of idleness
One, and one other, yes, for there were two
The second round the curving hillside road
Was a girl, and she halted some way off
To reconnoitre, and then made up her mind
At least to pass by and see who he was,
And perhaps hear some word about the weather
This was some Stark she didn't know He nodded
'No fête to-day,' he said

'It looks that way'

She swept the heavens, turning on her heel
'I only idled down'

'I idled down'

Provision there had been for just such meeting
Of stranger cousins, in a family tree
Drawn on a sort of passport with the branch
Of the one bearing it done in detail—
Some zealous one's laborious device
She made a sudden movement toward her bodice,
As one who clasps her heart They laughed together
'Stark?' he inquired 'No matter for the proof'

'Yes, Stark And you?'

'I'm Stark' He drew his passport

'You know we might not be and still be cousins
The town is full of Chases, Lowes, and Baileys,
All claiming some priority in Starkness
My mother was a Lane, yet might have married
Anyone upon earth and still her children
Would have been Starks, and doubtless here to-day

'You riddle with your genealogy
Like a Viola I don't follow you '

'I only mean my mother was a Stark
Several times over, and by marrying father
No more than brought us back into the name '

'One ought not to be thrown into confusion
By a plain statement of relationship,
But I own what you say makes my head spin
You take my card—you seem so good at such things-
And see if you can reckon our cousinship
Why not take seats here on the cellar wall
And dangle feet among the raspberry vines?'

'Under the shelter of the family tree '

'Just so—that ought to be enough protection '

'Not from the rain I think it's going to rain '

'It's raining '

'No, it's misting, let's be fair
Does the rain seem to you to cool the eyes?'

The situation was like this the road
Bowed outward on the mountain half-way up,
And disappeared and ended not far off
No one went home that way The only house
Beyond where they were was a shattered seedpod
And below roared a brook hidden in trees,
The sound of which was silence for the place
This he sat listening to till she gave judgment

'On father's side, it seems, we're—let me see—'

'Don't be too technical —You have three cards '

'Four cards, one yours, three mine, one for each branch
Of the Stark family I'm a member of '

'D'you know a person so related to herself
Is supposed to be mad '

'I may be mad '

'You look so, sitting out here in the rain
Studying genealogy with me
You never saw before What will we come to
With all this pride of ancestry, we Yankees?
I think we're all mad. Tell me why we're here

Drawn into town about this cellar hole
Like wild geese on a lake before a storm?
What do we see in such a hole, I wonder '

'The Indians had a myth of Chicamoztoc,
Which means The Seven Caves that We Came out of
This is the pit from which we Starks were digged '

'You must be learned That's what you see in it?'

'And what do you see?'

'Yes, what *do* I see?
First let me look I see raspberry vines—'

'Oh, if you're going to use your eyes, just hear
What *I* see It's a little, little boy,
As pale and dim as a match flame in the sun,
He's groping in the cellar after jam,
He thinks it's dark and it's flooded with daylight '

'He's nothing Listen When I lean like this
I can make out old Grandsir Stark distinctly,—
With his pipe in his mouth and his brown jug—
Bless you, it isn't Grandsir Stark, it's Granny,
But the pipe's there and smoking and the jug
She's after cider, the old girl, she's thirsty,
Here's hoping she gets her drink and gets out safely '

'Tell me about her Does she look like me?'

'She should, shouldn't she, you're so many times
Over descended from her I believe
She does look like you Stay the way you are
The nose is just the same, and so's the chin
Making allowance, making due allowance '

'You poor, dear, great, great, great, great Granny!'

'See that you get her greatness right Don't stint her '

'Yes, it's important, though you think it isn't
I won't be teased But see how wet I am '

'Yes, you must go, we can't stay here for ever
But wait until I give you a hand up
A bead of silver water more or less
Strung on your hair won't hurt your summer looks
I wanted to try something with the noise
That the brook raises in the empty valley
We have seen visions—now consult the voices
Something I must have learned riding in trains
When I was young I used to use the roar
To set the voices speaking out of it,
Speaking or singing, and the band-music playing
Perhaps you have the art of what I mean
I've never listened in among the sounds
That a brook makes in such a wild descent.
It ought to give a purer oracle '

'It's as you throw a picture on a screen
The meaning of it all is out of you,
The voices give you what you wish to hear '

'Strangely, it's anything they wish to give '

'Then I don't know It must be strange enough.
I wonder if it's not your make-believe
What do you think you're like to hear to-day?'

'From the sense of our having been together—
But why take time for what I'm like to hear?
I'll tell you what the voices really say
You will do very well right where you are
A little longer I mustn't feel too hurried,
Or I can't give myself to hear the voices '

'Is this some trance you are withdrawing into?'

'You must be very still, you mustn't talk '

'I'll hardly breathe '

'The voices seem to say—'

'I'm waiting '

'Don't! The voices seem to say:
Call her Nausicaa, the unafraid
Of an acquaintance made adventurously '

'I let you say that—on consideration'

'I don't see very well how you can help it
You want the truth I speak but by the voices
You see they know I haven't had your name,
Though what a name should matter between us-

'I shall suspect—'

'Be good The voices say
Call her Nausicaa, and take a timber
That you shall find lies in the cellar charred
Among the raspberries, and hew and shape it
For a door-sill or other corner piece
In a new cottage on the ancient spot
The life is not yet all gone out of it
And come and make your summer dwelling here,
And perhaps she will come, still unafraid,
And sit before you in the open door
With flowers in her lap until they fade,
But not come in across the sacred sill—'

'I wonder where your oracle is tending
You can see that there's something wrong with it,
Or it would speak in dialect Whose voice
Does it purport to speak in? Not old Grandsir's
Nor Granny's, surely Call up one of them
They have best right to be heard in this place'

'You seem so partial to our great-grandmother
(Nine times removed Correct me if I err)
You will be likely to regard as sacred
Anything she may say But let me warn you,
Folks in her day were given to plain speaking
You think you'd best tempt her at such a time?'

'It rests with us always to cut her off '

'Well then, it's Granny speaking "I dunnow!
Mebbe I'm wrong to take it as I do
There ain't no names quite like the old ones
though,
Nor never will be to my way of thinking
One mustn't bear too hard on the new comers,
But there's a dite too many of them for comfort
I should feel easier if I could see
More of the salt wherewith they're to be salted
Son, you do as you're told! You take the timber—
It's as sound as the day when it was cut—
And begin over—" There, she'd better stop
You can see what is troubling Granny, though
But don't you think we sometimes make too much
Of the old stock? What counts is the ideals,
And those will bear some keeping still about '

'I can see we are going to be good friends '

'I like your "going to be " You said just now
It's going to rain '

'I know, and it was raining
I let you say all that But I must go now '

'You let me say it? on consideration?
How shall we say good-bye in such a case?'

'How shall we?'

'Will you leave the way to me?'

'No, I don't trust your eyes You've said enough
Now give me your hand up —Pick me that flower '

'Where shall we meet again?'

'Nowhere but here
Once more before we meet elsewhere '

'In rain?

'It ought to be in rain Sometime in rain
In rain to-morrow, shall we, if it rains?
But if we must, in sunshine ' So she went

THE HOUSEKEEPER

I let myself in at the kitchen door

'It's you,' she said 'I can't get up Forgive me
Not answering your knock I can no more
Let people in than I can keep them out
I'm getting too old for my size, I tell them
My fingers are about all I've the use of
So's to take any comfort I can sew
I help out with this beadwork what I can '

'That's a smart pair of pumps you're beading there
Who are they for?'

'You mean?—oh, for some miss
I can't keep track of other people's daughters
Lord, if I were to dream of everyone
Whose shoes I primped to dance in!'

'And where's John?

'Haven't you seen him? Strange what set you off
To come to his house when he's gone to yours
You can't have passed each other I know what
He must have changed his mind and gone to Garland's
He won't be long in that case You can wait
Though what good you can be, or anyone—
It's gone so far You've heard? Estelle's run off '

'Yes, what's it all about? When did she go?

'Two weeks since '

'She's in earnest, it appears

'I'm sure she won't come back She's hiding somewhere
I don't know where myself John thinks I do
He thinks I only have to say the word,
And she'll come back But, bless you, I'm her mother—
I can't talk to her, and, Lord, if I could!'

'It will go hard with John What will he do?
He can't find anyone to take her place '

'Oh, if you ask me that, what *will* he do?
He gets some sort of bakeshop meals together,
With me to sit and tell him everything,
What's wanted and how much and where it is
But when I'm gone—of course I can't stay here
Estelle's to take me when she's settled down
He and I only hinder one another
I tell them they can't get me through the door, though
I've been built in here like a big church organ
We've been here fifteen years '

'That's a long time
To live together and then pull apart

How do you see him living when you're gone?
Two of you out will leave an empty house '

'I don't just see him living many years,
Left here with nothing but the furniture
I hate to think of the old place when we're gone,
With the brook going by below the yard,
And no one here but hens blowing about
If he could sell the place, but then, he can't
No one will ever live on it again
It's too run down This is the last of it
What I think he will do, is let things smash
He'll sort of swear the time away He's awful!
I never saw a man let family troubles
Make so much difference in his man's affairs
He's just dropped everything He's like a child.
I blame his being brought up by his mother
He's got hay down that's been rained on three times.
He hoed a little yesterday for me
I thought the growing things would do him good
Something went wrong I saw him throw the hoe
Sky-high with both hands I can see it now—
Come here—I'll show you—in that apple tree
That's no way for a man to do at his age
He's fifty-five, you know, if he's a day '

'Aren't you afraid of him? What's that gun for?'

'Oh, that's been there for hawks since chicken-time.
John Hall touch me! Not if he knows his friends

I'll say that for him, John's no threatener
Like some men folk No one's afraid of him,
All is, he's made up his mind not to stand
What he has got to stand '

'Where is Estelle?
Couldn't one talk to her? What does she say?
You say you don't know where she is '

'Nor want to!
She thinks if it was bad to live with him,
It must be right to leave him '

'Which is wrong!'

'Yes, but he should have married her '

'I know '

'The strain's been too much for her all these years
I can't explain it any other way
It's different with a man, at least with John
He knows he's kinder than the run of men.
Better than married ought to be as good
As married—that's what he has always said
I know the way he's felt—but all the same!'

'I wonder why he doesn't marry her
And end it '

'Too late now she wouldn't have him
He's given her time to think of something else
That's his mistake The dear knows my interest
Has been to keep the thing from breaking up
This is a good home I don't ask for better
But when I've said, "Why shouldn't they be married,"
He'd say, "Why should they?" no more words than
that'

'And after all why should they? John's been fair
I take it What was his was always hers
There was no quarrel about property'

'Reason enough, there was no property.
A friend or two as good as own the farm,
Such as it is It isn't worth the mortgage'

'I mean Estelle has always held the purse'

'The rights of that are harder to get at
I guess Estelle and I have filled the purse
'Twas we let him have money, not he us
John's a bad farmer I'm not blaming him
Take it year in, year out, he doesn't make much
We came here for a home for me, you know,
Estelle to do the housework for the board
Of both of us But look how it turns out
She seems to have the housework, and besides
Half of the outdoor work, though as for that,
He'd say she does it more because she likes it.

You see our pretty things are all outdoors
Our hens and cows and pigs are always better
Than folks like us have any business with
Farmers around twice as well off as we
Haven't as good They don't go with the farm
One thing you can't help liking about John,
He's fond of nice things—too fond, some would say.
But Estelle don't complain she's like him there
She wants our hens to be the best there are
You never saw this room before a show,
Full of lank, shivery, half-drowned birds
In separate coops, having their plumage done
The smell of the wet feathers in the heat!
You spoke of John's not being safe to stay with
You don't know what a gentle lot we are
We wouldn't hurt a hen! You ought to see us
Moving a flock of hens from place to place
We're not allowed to take them upside down,
All we can hold together by the legs
Two at a time's the rule, one on each arm,
No matter how far and how many times
We have to go'

'You mean that's John's idea'

'And we live up to it, or I don't know
What childishness he wouldn't give way to
He manages to keep the upper hand
On his own farm He's boss But as to hens
We fence our flowers in and the hens range

Nothing's too good for them We say it pays
John likes to tell the offers he has had,
Twenty for this cock, twenty-five for that
He never takes the money If they're worth
That much to sell, they're worth as much to keep
Bless you, it's all expense, though Reach me down
The little tin box on the cupboard shelf,
The upper shelf, the tin box That's the one
I'll show you Here you are '

'What's this?'

'A bill—
For fifty dollars for one Langshang cock—
Receipted And the cock is in the yard '

'Not in a glass case, then?'

'He'd need a tall one
He can eat off a barrel from the ground
He's been in a glass case, as you may say,
The Crystal Palace, London He's imported
John bought him, and we paid the bill with beads—
Wampum, I call it Mind, we don't complain
But you see, don't you, we take care of him '

'And like it, too It makes it all the worse '

'It seems as if And that's not all he's helpless
In ways that I can hardly tell you of

Sometimes he gets possessed to keep accounts
To see where all the money goes so fast
You know how men will be ridiculous
But it's just fun the way he gets bedeviled—
If he's untidy now, what will he be—?'

'It makes it all the worse You must be blind '

'Estelle's the one You needn't talk to me '

'Can't you and I get to the root of it?
What's the real trouble? What will satisfy her?'

'It's as I say she's turned from him, that's all '

'But why, when she's well off? Is it the neighbours,
Being cut off from friends?'

'We have our friends
That isn't it Folks aren't afraid of us '

'She's let it worry her You stood the strain,
And you're her mother '

'But I didn't always
I didn't relish it along at first
But I got wonted to it And besides—
John said I was too old to have grandchildren
But what's the use of talking when it's done?
She won't come back—it's worse than that—she can't.'

'Why do you speak like that? What do you know?
What do you mean?—she's done harm to herself?'

'I mean she's married—married someone else '

'Oho, oho!'

'You don't believe me '

'Yes, I do,
Only too well I knew there must be something!
So that was what was back She's bad, that's all!'

'Bad to get married when she had the chance?'

'Nonsense! See what she's done! But who, but who—

'Who'd marry her straight out of such a mess?
Say it right out—no matter for her mother
The man was found I'd better name no names
John himself won't imagine who he is '

'Then it's all up I think I'll get away
You'll be expecting John I pity Estelle,
I suppose she deserves some pity, too
You ought to have the kitchen to yourself
To break it to him You may have the job '

'You needn't think you're going to get away
John's almost here I've had my eye on someone

Coming down Ryan's Hill I thought 'twas him
Here he is now This box! Put it away
And this bill '

'What's the hurry? He'll unhitch '

'No, he won't, either He'll just drop the reins
And turn Doll out to pasture, rig and all
She won't get far before the wheels hang up
On something—there's no harm See, there he is!
My, but he looks as if he must have heard!'

John threw the door wide but he didn't enter
'How are you, neighbour? Just the man I'm after
Isn't it Hell,' he said 'I want to know
Come out here if you want to hear me talk
I'll talk to you, old woman, afterward
I've got some news that maybe isn't news
What are they trying to do to me, these two?'

'Do go along with him and stop his shouting '
She raised her voice against the closing door
'Who wants to hear your news, you—dreadful fool?'

THE FEAR

A lantern light from deeper in the barn
Shone on a man and woman in the door
And threw their lurching shadows on a house
Near by, all dark in every glossy window
A horse's hoof pawed once the hollow floor,
And the back of the gig they stood beside
Moved in a little The man grasped a wheel,
The woman spoke out sharply, 'Whoa, stand still!
I saw it just as plain as a white plate,'
She said, 'as the light on the dashboard ran
Along the bushes at the roadside—a man's face
You *must* have seen it too '

'I didn't see it.

Are you sure—'

'Yes, I'm sure!'

'—it was a face?'

'Joel, I'll have to look I can't go in,
I can't, and leave a thing like that unsettled
Doors locked and curtains drawn will make no difference
I always have felt strange when we came home
To the dark house after so long an absence,
And the key rattled loudly into place

Seemed to warn someone to be getting out
At one door as we entered at another
What if I'm right, and someone all the time—
Don't hold my arm!'

'I say it's someone passing'

'You speak as if this were a travelled road
You forget where we are What is beyond
That he'd be going to or coming from
At such an hour of night, and on foot too?
What was he standing still for in the bushes?'

'It's not so very late—it's only dark
There's more in it than you're inclined to say
Did he look like—?'

'He looked like anyone
I'll never rest to-night unless I know
Give me the lantern'

'You don't want the lantern

She pushed past him and got it for herself

'You're not to come,' she said 'This is my business
If the time's come to face it, I'm the one
To put it the right way He'd never dare—
Listen! He kicked a stone Hear that, hear that!
He's coming towards us Joel, *go* in—please
Hark!—I don't hear him now But please go in'

'In the first place you can't make me believe
it's—'

'It is—or someone else he's sent to watch
And now's the time to have it out with him
While we know definitely where he is
Let him get off and he'll be everywhere
Around us, looking out of trees and bushes
Till I sha'n't dare to set a foot outdoors
And I can't stand it Joel, let me go!'

'But it's nonsense to think he'd care enough '

'You mean you couldn't understand his caring.
Oh, but you see he hadn't had enough—
Joel, I won't—I won't—I promise you
We mustn't say hard things You mustn't either '

'I'll be the one, if anybody goes!
But you give him the advantage with this light
What couldn't he do to us standing here!
And if to see was what he wanted, why
He has seen all there was to see and gone '

He appeared to forget to keep his hold,
But advanced with her as she crossed the grass

'What do you want?' she cried to all the dark
She stretched up tall to overlook the light
That hung in both hands hot against her skirt.

'There's no one, so you're wrong,' he said

'There is
What do you want?' she cried, and then herself
Was startled when an answer really came

Nothing ' It came from well along the road

She reached a hand to Joel for support
The smell of scorching woollen made her faint.

"What are you doing round this house at night?'

'Nothing ' A pause there seemed no more to say

And then the voice again 'You seem afraid
I saw by the way you whipped up the horse
I'll just come forward in the lantern light
And let you see '

'Yes, do –Joel, go back!'

She stood her ground against the noisy steps
That came on, but her body rocked a little

'You see,' the voice said

'Oh ' She looked and looked

'You don't see—I've a child here by the hand
A robber wouldn't have his family with him '

'What's a child doing at this time of night—?'

'Out walking Every child should have the memory
Of at least one long-after-bedtime walk
What, son?'

'Then I should think you'd try to find
Somewhere to walk—'

'The highway, as it happens—
We're stopping for the fortnight down at Dean's.'

'But if that's all—Joel—you realize—
You won't think anything You understand?
You understand that we have to be careful
This is a very, very lonely place
Joel!' She spoke as if she couldn't turn
The swinging lantern lengthened to the ground,
It touched, it struck, it clattered and went out.

THE WOOD-PILE

Out walking in the frozen swamp one grey day,
I paused and said, 'I will turn back from here
No, I will go on farther—and we shall see '
The hard snow held me, save where now and then
One foot went through The view was all in lines
Straight up and down of tall slim trees
Too much alike to mark or name a place by
So as to say for certain I was here
Or somewhere else I was just far from home
A small bird flew before me He was careful
To put a tree between us when he lighted,
And say no word to tell me who he was
Who was so foolish as to think what *he* thought
He thought that I was after him for a feather—
The white one in his tail, like one who takes
Everything said as personal to himself
One flight out sideways would have undeceived him
And then there was a pile of wood for which
I forgot him and let his little fear
Carry him off the way I might have gone,
Without so much as wishing him good-night
He went behind it to make his last stand
It was a cord of maple, cut and split
And piled—and measured, four by four by eight
And not another like it could I see
No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it
And it was older sure than this year's cutting,

Or even last year's or the year's before
The wood was grey and the bark warping off it
And the pile somewhat sunken Clematis
Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.
What held it though on one side was a tree
Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,
These latter about to fall I thought that only
Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks
Could so forget his handiwork on which
He spent himself, the labour of his axe,
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace
To warm the frozen swamp as best it could
With the slow smokeless burning of decay

GOOD HOURS

I had for my winter evening walk-
No one at all with whom to talk,
But I had the cottages in a row
Up to their shining eyes in snow

And I thought I had the folk within
I had the sound of a violin,
I had a glimpse through curtain laces
Of youthful forms and youthful faces

I had such company outward bound
I went till there were no cottages found
I turned and repented, but coming back
I saw no window but that was black

Over the snow my creaking feet
Disturbed the slumbering village street
Like profanation, by your leave,
At ten o'clock of a winter eve

Mountain Interval

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth,

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

CHRISTMAS TREES

A CHRISTMAS CIRCULAR LETTER

The city had withdrawn into itself
And left at last the country to the country,
When between whirls of snow not come to lie
And whirls of foliage not yet laid, there drove
A stranger to our yard, who looked the city,
Yet did in country fashion in that there
He sat and waited till he drew us out
A-buttoning coats to ask him who he was
He proved to be the city come again
To look for something it had left behind
And could not do without and keep its Christmas
He asked if I would sell my Christmas trees,
My woods—the young fir balsams like a place
Where houses all are churches and have spires
I hadn't thought of them as Christmas trees
I doubt if I was tempted for a moment
To sell them off their feet to go in cars
And leave the slope behind the house all bare,
Where the sun shines now no warmer than the moon
I'd hate to have them know it if I was
Yet more I'd hate to hold my trees except
As others hold theirs or refuse for them,
Beyond the time of profitable growth,
The trial by market everything must come to
I dallied so much with the thought of selling
Then whether from mistaken courtesy

And fear of seeming short of speech, or whether
From hope of hearing good of what was mine,
I said, 'There aren't enough to be worth while '

'I could soon tell how many they would cut,
You let me look them over '

'You could look
But don't expect I'm going to let you have them '
Pasture they spring in, some in clumps too close
That lop each other of boughs, but not a few
Quite solitary and having equal boughs
All round and round The latter he nodded 'Yes' to,
Or paused to say beneath some lovelier one,
With a buyer's moderation, 'That would do '
I thought so too, but wasn't there to say so
We climbed the pasture on the south, crossed over,
And came down on the north

He said, 'A thousand '

'A thousand Christmas trees!—at what apiece?'

He felt some need of softening that to me
'A thousand trees would come to thirty dollars '

Then I was certain I had never meant
To let him have them Never show surprise!
But thirty dollars seemed so small beside
The extent of pasture I should strip, three cents

(For that was all they figured out apiece),
Three cents so small beside the dollar friends
I should be writing to within the hour
Would pay in cities for good trees like those,
Regular vestry-trees whole Sunday Schools
Could hang enough on to pick off enough
A thousand Christmas trees I didn't know I had!
Worth three cents more to give away than sell
As may be shown by a simple calculation
Too bad I couldn't lay one in a letter
I can't help wishing I could send you one,
In wishing you herewith a Merry Christmas

AN OLD MAN'S WINTER NIGHT

All out of doors looked darkly in at him
Through the thin frost, almost in separate stars,
That gathers on the pane in empty rooms
What kept his eyes from giving back the gaze
Was the lamp tilted near them in his hand
What kept him from remembering the need
That brought him to that creaking room was age
He stood with barrels round him—at a loss
And having scared the cellar under him
In clomping there, he scared it once again
In clomping off,—and scared the outer night,
Which has its sounds, familiar, like the roar
Of trees and crack of branches, common things,
But nothing so like beating on a box
A light he was to no one but himself
Where now he sat, concerned with he knew what,
A quiet light, and then not even that
He consigned to the moon, such as she was,
So late-arising, to the broken moon
As better than the sun in any case
For such a charge, his snow upon the roof,
His icicles along the wall to keep,
And slept The log that shifted with a jolt
Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted,
And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept
One aged man—one man—can't keep a house,

A farm, a countryside, or if he can,
It's thus he does it of a winter night

THE TELEPHONE

'When I was just as far as I could walk
From here to-day,
There was an hour
All still
When leaning with my head against a flower
I heard you talk
Don't say I didn't, for I heard you say—
You spoke from that flower on the window sill—
Do you remember what it was you said?'

'First tell me what it was you thought you heard '

'Having found the flower and driven a bee away,
I leaned my head,
And holding by the stalk,
I listened and I thought I caught the word—
What was it? Did you call me by my name?
Or did you say—
Someone said "Come"—I heard it as I bowed '

'I may have thought as much, but not aloud '

'Well, so I came '

HYLA BROOK

By June our brook's run out of song and speed
Sought for much after that, it will be found
Either to have gone groping underground
(And taken with it all the Hyla breed
That shouted in the mist a month ago,
Like ghost of sleigh-bells in a ghost of snow)—
Or flourished and come up in jewel-weed,
Weak foliage that is blown upon and bent
Even against the way its waters went
Its bed is left a faded paper sheet
Of dead leaves stuck together by the heat—
A brook to none but who remember long
This as it will be seen is other far
Than with brooks taken otherwhere in song
We love the things we love for what they are

THE OVEN BIRD

There is a singer everyone has heard,
Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,
Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again
He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten
He says the early petal-fall is past
When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
On sunny days a moment overcast,
And comes that other fall we name the fall
He says the highway dust is over all
The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing

BOND AND FREE

Love has earth to which she clings
With hills and circling arms about—
Wall within wall to shut fear out
But Thought has need of no such things,
For Thought has a pair of dauntless wings

On snow and sand and turf, I see
Where Love has left a printed trace
With straining in the world's embrace
And such is Love and glad to be
But Thought has shaken his ankles free

Thought cleaves the interstellar gloom
And sits in Sirius' disc all night,
Till day makes him retrace his flight,
With smell of burning on every plume,
Back past the sun to an earthly room

His gains in heaven are what they are
Yet some say Love by being thrall
And simply staying possesses all
In several beauty that Thought fares far
To find fused in another star

BIRCHES

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
Ice-storms do that Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break, though once they are
bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,

Summer or winter, and could play alone
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground He always kept his poise.
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground
So was I once myself a swinger of birches
And so I dream of going back to be
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open
I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return Earth's the right place for love
I don't know where it's likely to go better
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,

But dipped its top and set me down again
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches

PEA BRUSH

I walked down alone Sunday after church
To the place where John has been cutting trees
To see for myself about the birch
He said I could have to bush my peas

The sun in the new-cut narrow gap
Was hot enough for the first of May,
And stifling hot with the odor of sap
From stumps still bleeding their life away

The frogs that were peeping a thousand shrill
Wherever the ground was low and wet,
The minute they heard my step went still
To watch me and see what I came to get

Birch boughs enough piled everywhere!—
All fresh and sound from the recent axe
Time someone came with cart and pair
And got them off the wild flowers' backs

They might be good for garden things
To curl a little finger round,
The same as you seize cat's-cradle strings,
And lift themselves up off the ground

Small good to anything growing wild,
 They were crooking many a trillium
That had budded before the boughs were piled
 And since it was coming up had to come.

PUTTING IN THE SEED

You come to fetch me from my work to-night
When supper's on the table, and we'll see
If I can leave off burying the white
Soft petals fallen from the apple tree
(Soft petals, yes, but not so barren quite,
Mingled with these, smooth bean and wrinkled pea,)
And go along with you ere you lose sight
Of what you came for and become like me,
Slave to a springtime passion for the earth
How Love burns through the Putting in the Seed
On through the watching for that early birth
When, just as the soil tarnishes with weed,

The sturdy seedling with arched body comes
Shouldering its way and shedding the earth crumbs

A TIME TO TALK

When a friend calls to me from the road
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,
I don't stand still and look around
On all the hills I haven't hoed,
And shout from where I am, 'What is it?'
No, not as there is a time to talk
I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,
Blade-end up and five feet tall,
And plod I go up to the stone wall
For a friendly visit

THE COW IN APPLE TIME

Something inspires the only cow of late
To make no more of a wall than an open gate,
And think no more of wall-builders than fools
Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools
A cider syrup Having tasted fruit,
She scorns a pasture withering to the root
She runs from tree to tree where lie and sweeten
The windfalls spiked with stubble and worm-eaten
She leaves them bitten when she has to fly
She bellows on a knoll against the sky
Her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry

AN ENCOUNTER

Once on the kind of day called 'weather breeder,'
When the heat slowly hazes and the sun
By its own power seems to be undone,
I was half boring through, half climbing through
A swamp of cedar Choked with oil of cedar
And scurf of plants, and weary and over-heated,
And sorry I ever left the road I knew,
I paused and rested on a sort of hook
That had me by the coat as good as seated,
And since there was no other way to look,
Looked up toward heaven, and there against the blue,
Stood over me a resurrected tree,
A tree that had been down and raised again—
A barkless spectre He had halted too,
As if for fear of treading upon me
I saw the strange position of his hands—
Up at his shoulders, dragging yellow strands
Of wire with something in it from men to men
'You here?' I said 'Where aren't you nowadays?
And what's the news you carry—if you know?
And tell me where you're off for—Montreal?
Me? I'm not off for anywhere at all
Sometimes I wander out of beaten ways
Half looking for the orchid Calypso '

RANGE-FINDING

The battle rent a cobweb diamond-strung
And cut a flower beside a ground bird's nest
Before it stained a single human breast
The stricken flower bent double and so hung
And still the bird revisited her young
A butterfly its fall had dispossessed
A moment sought in air his flower of rest,
Then lightly stooped to it and fluttering clung

On the bare upland pasture there had spread
O'ernight 'twixt mullein stalks a wheel of thread
And straining cables wet with silver dew
A sudden passing bullet shook it dry
The indwelling spider ran to greet the fly,
But finding nothing, sullenly withdrew

THE HILL WIFE

LONELINESS

Her Word

One ought not to have to care
So much as you and I
Care when the birds come round the house
To seem to say good-bye,

Or care so much when they come back
With whatever it is they sing,
The truth being we are as much
Too glad for the one thing

As we are too sad for the other here—
With birds that fill their breasts
But with each other and themselves
And their built or driven nests

HOUSE FEAR

Always—I tell you this they learned—
Always at night when they returned
To the lonely house from far away
To lamps unlighted and fire gone gray,
They learned to rattle the lock and key
To give whatever might chance to be
Warning and time to be off in flight:

And preferring the out- to the in-door night,
They learned to leave the house-door wide
Until they had lit the lamp inside

THE SMILE

Her Word

I didn't like the way he went away
That smile! It never came of being gay
Still he smiled—did you see him?—I was sure!
Perhaps because we gave him only bread
And the wretch knew from that that we were poor
Perhaps because he let us give instead
Of seizing from us as he might have seized
Perhaps he mocked at us for being wed,
Or being very young (and he was pleased
To have a vision of us old and dead)
I wonder how far down the road he's got
He's watching from the woods as like as not.

THE OFT-REPEATED DREAM

She had no saying dark enough
 For the dark pine that kept
Forever trying the window-latch
 Of the room where they slept

The tireless but ineffectual hands
 That with every futile pass

Made the great tree seem as a little bird
 Before the mystery of glass!

It never had been inside the room,
 And only one of the two
Was afraid in an oft-repeated dream
 Of what the tree might do

THE IMPULSE

It was too lonely for her there,
 And too wild,
And since there were but two of them,
 And no child,

And work was little in the house
 She was free,
And followed where he furrowed field,
 Or felled tree

She rested on a log and tossed
 The fresh chips,
With a song only to herself
 On her lips

And once she went to break a bough
 Of black alder
She strayed so far she scarcely heard
 When he called her—

And didn't answer—didn't speak—
 Or return
She stood, and then she ran and hid
 In the fern

He never found her, though he looked
 Everywhere,
And he asked at her mother's house
 Was she there

Sudden and swift and light as that
 The ties gave,
And he learned of finalities
 Besides the grave

THE BONFIRE

'Oh, let's go up the hill and scare ourselves,
As reckless as the best of them to-night,
By setting fire to all the brush we piled
With pitchy hands to wait for rain or snow
Oh, let's not wait for rain to make it safe
The pile is ours we dragged it bough on bough
Down dark converging paths between the pines
Let's not care what we do with it to-night
Divide it? No! But burn it as one pile
The way we piled it And let's be the talk
Of people brought to windows by a light
Thrown from somewhere against their wall-paper
Rouse them all, both the free and not so free
With saying what they'd like to do to us
For what they'd better wait till we have done
Let's all but bring to life this old volcano,
If that is what the mountain ever was—
And scare ourselves Let wild fire loose we will

'And scare you too?' the children said together

'Why wouldn't it scare me to have a fire
Begin in smudge with ropy smoke and know
That still, if I repent, I may recall it,
But in a moment not a little spurt
Of burning fatness, and then nothing but
The fire itself can put it out, and that

By burning out, and before it burns out
It will have roared first and mixed sparks with stars,
And sweeping round it with a flaming sword,
Made the dim trees stand back in wider circle—
Done so much and I know not how much more
I mean it shall not do if I can bind it
Well if it doesn't with its draft bring on
A wind to blow in earnest from some quarter,
As once it did with me upon an April
The breezes were so spent with winter blowing
They seemed to fail the bluebirds under them
Short of the perch their languid flight was toward,
And my flame made a pinnacle to heaven
As I walked once around it in possession
But the wind out of doors—you know the saying
There came a gust You used to think the trees
Made wind by fanning since you never knew
It blow but that you saw the trees in motion
Something or someone watching made that gust
It put the flame tip-down and dabbed the grass
Of over-winter with the least tip-touch
Your tongue gives salt or sugar in your hand
The place it reached to blackened instantly
The black was almost all there was by day-light,
That and the merest curl of cigarette smoke—
And a flame slender as the hepaticas,
Blood-root, and violets so soon to be now
But the black spread like black death on the ground,
And I think the sky darkened with a cloud
Like winter and evening coming on together

They were enough things to be thought of then
Where the field stretches toward the north
And setting sun to Hyla brook, I gave it
To flames without twice thinking, where it verges
Upon the road, to flames too, though in fear
They might find fuel there, in withered brake,
Grass its full length, old silver golden-rod,
And alder and grape vine entanglement,
To leap the dusty deadline For my own
I took what front there was beside I knelt
And thrust hands in and held my face away
Fight such a fire by rubbing not by beating
A board is the best weapon if you have it
I had my coat And oh, I knew, I knew,
And said out loud, I couldn't bide the smother
And heat so close in, but the thought of all
The woods and town on fire by me, and all
The town turned out to fight for me—that held me.
I trusted the brook barrier, but feared
The road would fail, and on that side the fire
Died not without a noise of crackling wood—
Of something more than tinder-grass and weed
That brought me to my feet to hold it back
By leaning back myself, as if the reins
Were round my neck and I was at the plough
I won! But I'm sure no one ever spread
Another color over a tenth the space
That I spread coal-black over in the time
It took me Neighbors coming home from town
Couldn't believe that so much black had come there

While they had backs turned, that it hadn't been there
When they had passed an hour or so before
Going the other way and they not seen it
They looked about for someone to have done it
But there was no one I was somewhere wondering
Where all my weariness had gone and why
I walked so light on air in heavy shoes
In spite of a scorched Fourth-of-July feeling
Why wouldn't I be scared remembering that?'

'If it scares you, what will it do to us?'

'Scare you But if you shrink from being scared,
What would you say to war if it should come?
That's what for reasons I should like to know—
If you can comfort me by any answer '

'Oh, but war's not for children—it's for men '

'Now we are digging almost down to China
My dears, my dears, you thought that—we all thought
it
So your mistake was ours Haven't you heard, though,
About the ships where war has found them out
At sea, about the towns where war has come
Through opening clouds at night with droning speed
Further o'erhead than all but stars and angels,—
And children in the ships and in the towns?
Haven't you heard what we have lived to learn?
Nothing so new—something we had forgotten·

War is for everyone, for children too
I wasn't going to tell you and I mustn't
The best way is to come up hill with me
And have our fire and laugh and be afraid '

THE LAST WORD OF A BLUEBIRD

AS TOLD TO A CHILD

As I went out a Crow
In a low voice said 'Oh,
I was looking for you
How do you do?
I just came to tell you
To tell Lesley (will you?)
That her little Bluebird
Wanted me to bring word
That the north wind last night
That made the stars bright
And made ice on the trough
Almost made him cough
His tail feathers off
He just had to fly!
But he sent her Good-bye,
And said to be good,
And wear her red hood,
And look for skunk tracks
In the snow with an axe—
And do everything!
And perhaps in the spring
He would come back and sing'

OUT, OUT

The buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of
wood,
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it
And from there those that lifted eyes could count
Five mountain ranges one behind the other
Under the sunset far into Vermont
And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,
As it ran light, or had to bear a load
And nothing happened: day was all but done
Call it a day, I wish they might have said
To please the boy by giving him the half hour
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.
His sister stood beside them in her apron
To tell them 'Supper.' At the word, the saw,
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,
Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap
He must have given the hand. However it was,
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!
The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,
As he swung toward them holding up the hand
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all
Since he was old enough to know, big boy
Doing a man's work, though a child at heart.
He saw all spoiled. 'Don't let him cut my hand off.
The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!'

So But the hand was gone already
The doctor put him in the dark of ether
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath
And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright
No one believed They listened at his heart
Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it
No more to build on there And they, since they
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs

BROWN'S DESCENT

OR

THE WILLY-NILLY SLIDE

Brown lived at such a lofty farm
 That everyone for miles could see
His lantern when he did his chores
 In winter after half-past three

And many must have seen him make
 His wild descent from there one night,
'Cross lots, 'cross walls, 'cross everything,
 Describing rings of lantern light

Between the house and barn the gale
 Got him by something he had on
And blew him out on the icy crust
 That cased the world, and he was gone!

Walls were all buried, trees were few
 He saw no stay unless he stove
A hole in somewhere with his heel
 But though repeatedly he strove

And stamped and said things to himself,
 And sometimes something seemed to yield,
He gained no foothold, but pursued
 His journey down from field to field.

Sometimes he came with arms outspread
 Like wings, revolving in the scene
Upon his longer axis, and
 With no small dignity of mien

Faster or slower as he chanced,
 Sitting or standing as he chose,
According as he feared to risk
 His neck, or thought to spare his clothes,

He never let the lantern drop
 And some exclaimed who saw afar
The figures he described with it,
 'I wonder what those signals are

Brown makes at such an hour of night!
 He's celebrating something strange
I wonder if he's sold his farm,
 Or been made Master of the Grange'

He reeled, he lurched, he bobbed, he checked,
 He fell and made the lantern rattle
(But saved the light from going out)
 So half-way down he fought the battle,

Incredulous of his own bad luck
 And then becoming reconciled
To everything, he gave it up
 And came down like a coasting child

'Well—I—be—' that was all he said,
 As standing in the river road,
He looked back up the slippery slope
 (Two miles it was) to his abode

Sometimes as an authority
 On motor-cars, I'm asked if I
Should say our stock was petered out,
 And this is my sincere reply

Yankees are what they always were
 Don't think Brown ever gave up hope
Of getting home again because
 He couldn't climb that slippery slope,

Or even thought of standing there
 Until the January thaw
Should take the polish off the crust
 He bowed with grace to natural law,

And then went round it on his feet,
 After the manner of our stock,
Not much concerned for those to whom,
 At that particular time o'clock,

It must have looked as if the course
 He steered was really straight away
From that which he was headed for—
 Not much concerned for them, I say,

No more so than became a man—
And politician at odd seasons
I've kept Brown standing in the cold
While I invested him with reasons,

But now he snapped his eyes three times,
Then shook his lantern, saying, 'Ile's
'Bout out!' and took the long way home
By road, a matter of several miles

THE GUM-GATHERER

There overtook me and drew me in
To his down-hill, early-morning stride,
And set me five miles on my road
Better than if he had had me ride,
A man with a swinging bag for load
And half the bag wound round his hand
We talked like barking above the din
Of water we walked along beside
And for my telling him where I'd been
And where I lived in mountain land
To be coming home the way I was,
He told me a little about himself
He came from higher up in the pass
Where the grist of the new-beginning brooks
Is blocks split off the mountain mass—
And hopeless grist enough it looks
Ever to grind to soil for grass
(The way it is will do for moss)
There he had built his stolen shack
It had to be a stolen shack
Because of the fears of fire and loss
That trouble the sleep of lumber folk
Visions of half the world burned black
And the sun shrunken yellow in smoke
We know who when they come to town
Bring berries under the wagon seat,
Or a basket of eggs between their feet,

What this man brought in a cotton sack
Was gum, the gum of the mountain spruce
He showed me lumps of the scented stuff
Like uncut jewels, dull and rough
It comes to market golden brown,
But turns to pink between the teeth

I told him this is a pleasant life
To set your breast to the bark of trees
That all your days are dim beneath,
And reaching up with a little knife,
To loose the resin and take it down
And bring it to market when you please

THE LINE-GANG

Here come the line-gang pioneering by
They throw a forest down less cut than broken
They plant dead trees for living, and the dead
They string together with a living thread
They string an instrument against the sky
Wherein words whether beaten out or spoken
Will run as hushed as when they were a thought
But in no hush they string it they go past
With shouts afar to pull the cable taut,
To hold it hard until they make it fast,
To ease away—they have it With a laugh,
An oath of towns that set the wild at naught
They bring the telephone and telegraph

THE VANISHING RED

He is said to have been the last Red Man
In Acton And the Miller is said to have laughed.
If you like to call such a sound a laugh
But he gave no one else a laughter's license
For he turned suddenly grave as if to say,
'Whose business,—if I take it on myself,
Whose business—but why talk round the barn?
When it's just that I hold with getting a thing done
with
You can't get back and see it as he saw it
It's too long a story to go into now
You'd have to have been there and lived it
Then you wouldn't have looked on it as just a matter
Of who began it between the two races

Some guttural exclamation of surprise
The Red Man gave in poking about the mill
Over the great big thumping shuffling mill-stone
Disgusted the Miller physically as coming
From one who had no right to be heard from
"Come, John,' he said, 'you want to see the wheel pit

He took him down below a cramping rafter,
And showed him, through a manhole in the floor,
The water in desperate straits like frantic fish,
Salmon and sturgeon, lashing with their tails
Then he shut down the trap door with a ring in it

That jangled even above the general noise,
And came up stairs alone—and gave that laugh,
And said something to a man with a meal-sack
That the man with the meal-sack didn't catch—then.
Oh, yes, he showed John the wheel pit all right

The three stood listening to a fresh access
Of wind that caught against the house a moment,
Gulped snow, and then blew free again—the Coles
Dressed, but dishevelled from some hours of sleep,
Meserve belittled in the great skin coat he wore

Meserve was first to speak He pointed backward
Over his shoulder with his pipe-stem, saying,
'You can just see it glancing off the roof
Making a great scroll upward toward the sky,
Long enough for recording all our names on —
I think I'll just call up my wife and tell her
I'm here—so far—and starting on again
I'll call her softly so that if she's wise
And gone to sleep, she needn't wake to answer '
Three times he barely stirred the bell, then listened
'Why, Lett, still up? Lett, I'm at Cole's I'm late
I called you up to say Good-night from here
Before I went to say Good-morning there —
I thought I would —I know, but, Lett—I know—
I could, but what's the sense? The rest won't be
So bad —Give me an hour for it —Ho, ho,
Three hours to here! But that was all up hill,
The rest is down —Why no, no, not a wallow
They kept their heads and took their time to it
Like darlings, both of them They're in the barn —

My dear, I'm coming just the same I didn't
Call you to ask you to invite me home –'
He lingered for some word she wouldn't say,
Said it at last himself, 'Good-night,' and then
Getting no answer, closed the telephone
The three stood in the lamplight round the table
With lowered eyes a moment till he said,
'I'll just see how the horses are '

'Yes, do,'
Both the Coles said together Mrs Cole
Added 'You can judge better after seeing –
I want you here with me, Fred Leave him here,
Brother Meserve You know to find your way
Out through the shed '

'I guess I know my way,
I guess I know where I can find my name
Carved in the shed to tell me who I am
If it don't tell me where I am I used
To play–'

'You tend your horses and come back
Fred Cole, you're going to let him!'

'Well, aren't you
How can you help yourself?'

'I called him Brother
Why did I call him that?'

'It's right enough
That's all you ever heard him called round here
He seems to have lost off his Christian name '

'Christian enough I should call that myself
He took no notice, did he? Well, at least
I didn't use it out of love of him,
The dear knows I detest the thought of him
With his ten children under ten years old
I hate his wretched little Racker Sect,
All's ever I heard of it, which isn't much
But that's not saying—Look, Fred Cole, it's twelve
Isn't it, now? He's been here half an hour
He says he left the village store at nine
Three hours to do four miles—a mile an hour
Or not much better Why, it doesn't seem
As if a man could move that slow and move
Try to think what he did with all that time
And three miles more to go!'

'Don't let him go
Stick to him, Helen Make him answer you
That sort of man talks straight on all his life
From the last thing he said himself, stone deaf
To anything anyone else may say
I should have thought, though, you could make him
hear you '

'What is he doing out a night like this?
Why can't he stay at home?'

'He had to preach '

'It's no night to be out '

'He may be small,
He may be good, but one thing's sure, he's tough '

'And strong of stale tobacco '

'He'll pull through '

'You only say so Not another house
Or shelter to put into from this place
To theirs I'm going to call his wife again '

'Wait and he may Let's see what he will do
Let's see if he will think of her again
But then I doubt he's thinking of himself
He doesn't look on it as anything '

'He shan't go—there!'

'It *is* a night, my dear '

One thing he didn't drag God into it.'

'He don't consider it a case for God '

'You think so, do you? You don't know the kind.
He's getting up a miracle this minute

Privately—to himself, right now, he's thinking
He'll make a case of it if he succeeds,
But keep still if he fails '

'Keep still all over
He'll be dead—dead and buried '

'Such a trouble!
Not but I've every reason not to care
What happens to him if it only takes
Some of the sanctimonious conceit
Out of one of those pious scalawags '

'Nonsense to that! You want to see him safe '

'You like the runt '

'Don't you a little?'

'Well,
I don't like what he's doing, which is what
You like, and like him for '

'Oh, yes you do
You like your fun as well as anyone,
Only you women have to put these airs on
To impress men You've got us so ashamed
Of being men we can't look at a good fight
Between two boys and not feel bound to stop it
Let the man freeze an ear or two, I say —

He's here I leave him all to you Go in
And save his life —All right, come in, Meserve
Sit down, sit down How did you find the horses?'

'Fine, fine '

'And ready for some more? My wife here
Says it won't do You've got to give it up '

'Won't you to please me? Please! If I say please?
Mr Meserve, I'll leave it to *your* wife
What *did* your wife say on the telephone?'

Meserve seemed to heed nothing but the lamp
Or something not far from it on the table
By straightening out and lifting a forefinger,
He pointed with his hand from where it lay
Like a white crumpled spider on his knee
'That leaf there in your open book! It moved
Just then, I thought It's stood erect like that,
There on the table, ever since I came,
Trying to turn itself backward or forward,
I've had my eye on it to make out which,
If forward, then it's with a friend's impatience—
You see I know—to get you on to things
It wants to see how you will take, if backward
It's from regret for something you have passed
And failed to see the good of Never mind,
Things must expect to come in front of us
A many times—I don't say just how many—

That varies with the things—before we see them
One of the lies would make it out that nothing
Ever presents itself before us twice
Where would we be at last if that were so?
Our very life depends on everything's
Recurring till we answer from within
The thousandth time may prove the charm —That leaf!
It can't turn either way It needs the wind's help
But the wind didn't move it if it moved
It moved itself The wind's at naught in here
It couldn't stir so sensitively poised
A thing as that It couldn't reach the lamp
To get a puff of black smoke from the flame,
Or blow a rumple in the collie's coat
You make a little foursquare block of air,
Quiet and light and warm, in spite of all
The illimitable dark and cold and storm,
And by so doing give these three, lamp, dog,
And book-leaf, that keep near you, their repose,
Though for all anyone can tell, repose
May be the thing you haven't, yet you give it
So false it is that what we haven't we can't give,
So false, that what we always say is true
I'll have to turn the leaf if no one else will
It won't lie down Then let it stand Who cares?

'I shouldn't want to hurry you, Meserve,
But if you're going—Say you'll stay, you know.
But let me raise this curtain on a scene,

And show you how it's piling up against you
You see the snow-white through the white of frost?
Ask Helen how far up the sash it's climbed
Since last we read the gage '

'It looks as if
Some pallid thing had squashed its features flat
And its eyes shut with overeagerness
To see what people found so interesting
In one another, and had gone to sleep
Of its own stupid lack of understanding,
Or broken its white neck of mushroom stuff
Short off, and died against the window-pane '

'Brother Meserve, take care, you'll scare yourself
More than you will us with such nightmare talk
It's you it matters to, because it's you
Who have to go out into it alone '

'Let him talk, Helen, and perhaps he'll stay '

'Before you drop the curtain—I'm reminded
You recollect the boy who came out here
To breathe the air one winter—had a room
Down at the Averys'? Well, one sunny morning
After a downy storm, he passed our place
And found me banking up the house with snow.
And I was burrowing in deep for warmth,
Piling it well above the window-sills
The snow against the window caught his eye

"Hey, that's a pretty thought"—those were his words
"So you can think it s six feet deep outside,
While you sit warm and read up balanced rations
You can't get too much winter in the winter "
Those were his words And he went home and all
But banked the daylight out of Avery's windows
Now you and I would go to no such length
At the same time you can't deny it makes
It not a mite worse, sitting here, we three,
Playing our fancy, to have the snowline run
So high across the pane outside There where
There is a sort of tunnel in the frost
More like a tunnel than a hole—way down
At the far end of it you see a stir
And quiver like the frayed edge of the drift
Blown in the wind I *like* that—I like *that*
Well, now I leave you, people '

'Come, Meserve,
We thought you were deciding not to go—
The ways you found to say the praise of comfort
And being where you are You want to stay '

'I'll own it's cold for such a fall of snow
This house is frozen brittle, all except
This room you sit in If you think the wind
Sounds further off, it's not because it's dying,
You're further under in the snow—that's all—
And feel it less Hear the soft bombs of dust

It bursts against us at the chimney mouth,
And at the eaves I like it from inside
More than I shall out in it But the horses
Are rested and it's time to say good-night,
And let you get to bed again Good-night,
Sorry I had to break in on your sleep '

'Lucky for you you did Lucky for you
You had us for a half-way station
To stop at If you were the kind of man
Paid heed to women, you'd take my advice
And for your family's sake stay where you are
But what good is my saying it over and over?
You've done more than you had a right to think
You could do—*now* You know the risk you take
In going on '

'Our snow-storms as a rule
Aren't looked on as man-killers, and although
I'd rather be the beast that sleeps the sleep
Under it all, his door sealed up and lost,
Than the man fighting it to keep above it,
Yet think of the small birds at roost and not
In nests Shall I be counted less than they are?
Their bulk in water would be frozen rock
In no time out to-night And yet to-morrow
They will come budding boughs from tree to tree
Flirting their wings and saying Chickadee,
As if not knowing what you meant by the word
storm '

'But why when no one wants you to go on?
Your wife—she doesn't want you to We don't,
And you yourself don't want to Who else is there?'

'Save us from being cornered by a woman
Well, there's'—She told Fred afterward that in
The pause right there, she thought the dreaded word
Was coming, 'God ' But no, he only said
'Well, there's—the storm That says I must go on
That wants me as a war might if it came
Ask any man '

He threw her that as something
To last her till he got outside the door.
He had Cole with him to the barn to see him off
When Cole returned he found his wife still standing
Beside the table near the open book,
Not reading it

'Well, what kind of a man
Do you call that?' she said

'He had the gift
Of words, or is it tongues, I ought to say?'

'Was ever such a man for seeing likeness?'

'Or disregarding people's civil questions—
What? We've found out in one hour more about him
Than we had seeing him pass by in the road

A thousand times If that's the way he preaches!
You didn't think you'd keep him after all
Oh, I'm not blaming you He didn't leave you
Much say in the matter, and I'm just as glad
We're not in for a night of him No sleep
If he had stayed The least thing set him going
It's quiet as an empty church without him '

'But how much better off are we as it is?
We'll have to sit here till we know he's safe '

'Yes, I suppose you'll want to, but I shouldn't
He knows what he can do, or he wouldn't try
Get into bed I say, and get some rest
He won't come back, and if he telephones,
It won't be for an hour or two '

'Well then
We can't be any help by sitting here
And living his fight through with him, I suppose '

* * *

Cole had been telephoning in the dark
Mrs Cole's voice came from an inner room
'Did she call you or you call her?'

'She me
You'd better dress you won't go back to bed
We must have been asleep it's three and after '

'Had she been ringing long? I'll get my wrapper
I want to speak to her '

'All she said was,
He hadn't come and had he really started '

'She knew he had, poor thing, two hours ago '

'He had the shovel He'll have made a fight '

'Why did I ever let him leave this house!'

'Don't begin that You did the best you could
To keep him—though perhaps you didn't quite
Conceal a wish to see him show the spunk
To disobey you Much his wife'll thank you '

'Fred, after all I said! You shan't make out
That it was any way but what it was
Did she let on by any word she said
She didn't thank me?'

'When I told her "Gone,"
"Well then," she said, and "Well then"—like a threat
And then her voice came scraping slow "Oh, you,
Why did you let him go?" '

'Asked why we let him?
You let me there I'll ask her why she let him

She didn't dare to speak when he was here
Their number's—twenty-one? The thing won't work
Someone's receiver's down The handle stumbles
The stubborn thing, the way it jars your arm!
It's theirs She's dropped it from her hand and gone '

'Try speaking Say "Hello!" '

'Hello Hello '

'What do you hear?'

'I hear an empty room—
You know—it sounds that way And yes, I hear—
I think I hear a clock—and windows rattling
No step though If she's there she's sitting down '

'Shout, she may hear you '

'Shouting is no good '

'Keep speaking then '

'Hello Hello Hello
You don't suppose—? She wouldn't go out doors?'

'I'm half afraid that's just what she might do '

'And leave the children?'

'Wait and call again
You can't hear whether she has left the door
Wide open and the wind's blown out the lamp
And the fire's died and the room's dark and cold?'

'One of two things, either she's gone to bed
Or gone out doors '

'In which case both are lost
Do you know what she's like? Have you ever met her?
It's strange she doesn't want to speak to us '

'Fred, see if you can hear what I hear Come '

'A clock maybe '

'Don't you hear something else?'

'Not talking '

'No '

'Why, yes, I hear—what is it?'

'What do you say it is?'

'A baby's crying!
Frantic it sounds, though muffled and far off
Its mother wouldn't let it cry like that,
Not if she's there '

'There's only one thing possible to make,
That is, assuming—that she has gone out
Of course she hasn't though ' They both sat down
Helpless 'There's nothing we can do till morning '

'Fred, I shan't let you think of going out '

'Hold on ' The double bell began to chirp
They started up Fred took the telephone
'Hello, Meserve You're there, then!—And your wife?
Good! Why I asked—she didn't seem to answer
He says she went to let him in the barn —
We're glad Oh, say no more about it, man
Drop in and see us when you're passing '

'Well,
She has him then, though what she wants him for
I *don't* see '

'Possibly not for herself
Maybe she only wants him for the children '

'The whole to-do seems to have been for nothing
What spoiled our night was to him just his fun
What did he come in for?—To talk and visit?
Thought he'd just call to tell us it was snowing
If he thinks he is going to make our house
A half-way coffee house 'twixt town and nowhere—'

'I thought you'd feel you'd been too much concerned '

'You think you haven't been concerned yourself '

'If you mean he was inconsiderate
To rout us out to think for him at midnight
And then take our advice no more than nothing,
Why, I agree with you But let's forgive him
We've had a share in one night of his life
What'll you bet he ever calls again?'

THE SOUND OF THE TREES

I wonder about the trees
Why do we wish to bear
Forever the noise of these
More than another noise
So close to our dwelling place?
We suffer them by the day
Till we lose all measure of pace,
And fixity in our joys,
And acquire a listening air
They are that that talks of going
But never gets away,
And that talks no less for knowing,
As it grows wiser and older,
That now it means to stay
My feet tug at the floor
And my head sways to my shoulder
Sometimes when I watch trees sway,
From the window or the door
I shall set forth for somewhere,
I shall make the reckless choice
Some day when they are in voice
And tossing so as to scare
The white clouds over them on
I shall have less to say,
But I shall be gone

New Hampshire

NEW HAMPSHIRE

I met a lady from the South who said
(You won't believe she said it, but she said it)
'None of my family ever worked, or had
A thing to sell ' I don't suppose the work
Much matters You may work for all of me
I've seen the time I've had to work myself
The having anything to sell is what
Is the disgrace in man or state or nation

I met a traveller from Arkansas
Who boasted of his state as beautiful
For diamonds and apples 'Diamonds
And apples in commercial quantities?'
I asked him, on my guard 'Oh yes,' he answered,
Off his The time was evening in the Pullman
'I see the porter's made your bed,' I told him

I met a Californian who would
Talk California—a state so blessed,
He said, in climate, none had ever died there
A natural death, and Vigilance Committees
Had had to organize to stock the graveyards
And vindicate the state's humanity
'Just the way Steffanson runs on,' I murmured,
'About the British Arctic That's what comes
Of being in the market with a climate '

I met a poet from another state,
A zealot full of fluid inspiration,
Who in the name of fluid inspiration,
But in the best style of bad salesmanship,
Angrily tried to make me write a protest
(In verse I think) against the Volstead Act
He didn't even offer me a drink
Until I asked for one to steady *him*
This is called having an idea to sell

It never could have happened in New Hampshire

The only person really soiled with trade
I ever stumbled on in old New Hampshire
Was someone who had just come back ashamed
From selling things in California
He'd built a noble mansard roof with balls
On turrets like Constantinople, deep
In woods some ten miles from a railroad station,
As if to put forever out of mind
The hope of being, as we say, received
I found him standing at the close of day
Inside the threshold of his open barn,
Like a lone actor on a gloomy stage—
And recognized him through the iron grey
In which his face was muffled to the eyes
As an old boyhood friend, and once indeed
A drover with me on the road to Brighton
His farm was 'grounds,' and not a farm at all,
His house among the local sheds and shanties

Rose like a factor's at a trading station
And he was rich, and I was still a rascal
I couldn't keep from asking impolitely,
Where had he been and what had he been doing?
How did he get so? (Rich was understood)
In dealing in 'old rags' in San Francisco
Oh it was terrible as well could be
We both of us turned over in our graves
Just specimens is all New Hampshire has,
One each of everything as in a show-case
Which naturally she doesn't care to sell

She had one President (pronounce him Purse,
And make the most of it for better or worse
He's your one chance to score against the state)
She had one Daniel Webster He was all
The Daniel Webster ever was or shall be
She had the Dartmouth needed to produce him.

I call her old She has one family
Whose claim is good to being settled here
Before the era of colonization,
And before that of exploration even
John Smith remarked them as he coasted by
Dangling their legs and fishing off a wharf
At the Isles of Shoals, and satisfied himself
They weren't Red Indians, but veritable
Pre-primitives of the white race, dawn people,
Like those who furnished Adam's sons with
wives;

However unınnocent they may have been
In beıng there so early ın our hıstory
They'd been there then a hundred years or more
Pıty he dıdn't ask what they were up to
At that date wıth a wharf already built,
And take theır name They've sınce told me theır
name—
Today an honored one ın Nottıngham
As for what they were up to more than fishıng—
Suppose they weren't behavıng Purıtanly,
The hour had not yet struck for beıng good,
Mankınd had not yet gone on the Sabbatıcal
It became an explorer of the deep
Not to explore too deep ın others' busıness
Dıd you but know of hım, New Hampshıre has
One real reformer who would change the world
So ıt would be accepted by two classes,
Artısts the mınute they set up as artısts,
Before, that ıs, they are themselves accepted,
And boys the mınute they get out of college
I can't help thınkıng those are tests to go by

And she has one I don't know what to call hım,
Who comes from Phıladelphıa every year
Wıth a great flock of chıckens of rare breeds
He wants to gıve the educatıonal
Advantages of growıng almost wıld
Under the watchful eye of hawk and eagle—
Dorkıngs because they're spoken of by Chaucer
Sussex because they're spoken of by Herrick

She has a touch of gold New Hampshire gold—
You may have heard of it I had a farm
Offered me not long since up Berlin way
With a mine on it that was worked for gold,
But not gold in commercial quantities
Just enough gold to make the engagement rings
And marriage rings of those who owned the farm
What gold more innocent could one have asked for?
One of my children ranging after rocks
Lately brought home from Andover or Canaan
A specimen of beryl with a trace
Of radium I know with radium
The trace would have to be the merest trace
To be below the threshold of commercial,
But trust New Hampshire not to have enough
Of radium or anything to sell
A specimen of everything, I said
She has one witch—old style She lives in Colebrook
(The only other witch I ever met
Was lately at a cut-glass dinner in Boston
There were four candles and four people present
The witch was young, and beautiful (new style),
And open-minded She was free to question
Her gift for reading letters locked in boxes
Why was it so much greater when the boxes
Were metal than it was when they were wooden?
It made the world seem so mysterious
The S'ciety for Psychical Research
Was cognizant Her husband was worth millions
I think he owned some shares in Harvard College)

New Hampshire *used* to have at Salem
A company we called the White Corpuscles,
Whose duty was at any hour of night
To rush in sheets and fools' caps where they smelled
A thing the least bit doubtfully perscented
And give someone the Skipper Ireson's Ride

One each of everything as in a show-case
More than enough land for a specimen
You'll say she has, but there there enters in
Something else to protect her from herself
There quality makes up for quantity
Not even New Hampshire farms are much for sale
The farm I made my home on in the mountains
I had to take by force rather than buy
I caught the owner outdoors by himself
Raking up after winter, and I said,
'I'm going to put you off this farm I want it'
'Where are you going to put me? In the road?'
'I'm going to put you on the farm next to it'
'Why won't the farm next to it do for you?'
'I like this better' It was really better

Apples? New Hampshire has them, but unsprayed,
With no suspicion in stem-end or blossom-end
Of vitriol or arsenate of lead,
And so not good for anything but cider
Her unpruned grapes are flung like lariats
Far up the birches out of reach of man

A state producing precious metals, stones,
And—writing, none of these except perhaps
The precious literature in quantity
Or quality to worry the producer
About disposing of it Do you know,
Considering the market, there are more
Poems produced than any other thing?
No wonder poets sometimes have to *seem*
So much more business-like than business men
Their wares are so much harder to get rid of

She's one of the two best states in the Union
Vermont's the other And the two have been
Yoke-fellows in the sap-yoke from of old
In many Marches And they lie like wedges,
Thick end to thin end and thin end to thick end,
And are a figure of the way the strong
Of mind and strong of arm should fit together,
One thick where one is thin and vice versa
New Hampshire raises the Connecticut
In a trout hatchery near Canada,
But soon divides the river with Vermont
Both are delightful states for their absurdly
Small towns—Lost Nation, Bungey, Muddy Boo,
Poplin, Still Corners (so called not because
The place is silent all day long, nor yet
Because it boasts a whisky still—because
It set out once to be a city and still
Is only corners, cross-roads in a wood)

And I remember one whose name appeared
Between the pictures on a movie screen
Election night once in Franconia,
When everything had gone Republican
And Democrats were sore in need of comfort
Easton goes Democratic, Wilson 4
Hughes 2 And everybody to the saddest
Laughed the loud laugh, the big laugh at the little
New York (five million) laughs at Manchester,
Manchester (sixty or seventy thousand) laughs
At Littleton (four thousand), Littleton
Laughs at Franconia (seven hundred), and
Franconia laughs, I fear,—did laugh that night—
At Easton. What has Easton left to laugh at,
And like the actress exclaim, 'Oh my God' at?
There's Bungey, and for Bungey there are towns,
Whole townships named but without population

Anything I can say about New Hampshire
Will serve almost as well about Vermont,
Excepting that they differ in their mountains
The Vermont mountains stretch extended straight,
New Hampshire mountains curl up in a coil

I had been coming to New Hampshire mountains
And here I am and what am I to say?
Here first my theme becomes embarrassing
Emerson said, 'The God who made New Hampshire
Taunted the lofty land with little men'
Another Massachusetts poet said,

'I go no more to summer in New Hampshire
I've given up my summer place in Dublin'
But when I asked to know what ailed New Hampshire.
She said she couldn't stand the people in it,
The little men (it's Massachusetts speaking)
And when I asked to know what ailed the people,
She said, 'Go read your own books and find out'
I may as well confess myself the author
Of several books against the world in general
To take them as against a special state
Or even nation's to restrict my meaning
I'm what is called a sensibilitist,
Or otherwise an environmentalist
I refuse to adapt myself a mite
To any change from hot to cold, from wet
To dry, from poor to rich, or back again
I make a virtue of my suffering
From nearly everything that goes on round me.
In other words, I know wherever I am,
Being the creature of literature I am,
I shall not lack for pain to keep me awake
Kit Marlowe taught me how to say my prayers
'Why, this is Hell, nor am I out of it'
Samoa, Russia, Ireland I complain of,
No less than England, France and Italy
Because I wrote my novels in New Hampshire
Is no proof that I aimed them at New Hampshire

When I left Massachusetts years ago
Between two days, the reason why I sought

New Hampshire, not Connecticut,
Rhode Island, New York, or Vermont was this
Where I was living then, New Hampshire offered
The nearest boundary to escape across
I hadn't an illusion in my hand-bag
About the people being better there
Than those I left behind I thought they weren't
I thought they couldn't be And yet they were
I'd sure had no such friends in Massachusetts
As Hall of Windham, Gay of Atkinson,
Bartlett of Raymond (now of Colorado),
Harris of Derry, and Lynch of Bethlehem

The glorious bards of Massachusetts seem
To want to make New Hampshire people over
They taunt the lofty land with little men
I don't know what to say about the people
For art's sake one could almost wish them worse
Rather than better How are we to write
The Russian novel in America
As long as life goes so unterribly?
There is the pinch from which our only outcry
In literature to date is heard to come
We get what little misery we can
Out of not having cause for misery
It makes the guild of novel writers sick
To be expected to be Dostoievskis
On nothing worse than too much luck and comfort
This is not sorrow, though; it's just the vapors,
And recognized as such in Russia itself

Under the new régime, and so forbidden
If well it is with Russia, then feel free
To say so or be stood against the wall
And shot It's Pollyanna now or death
This, then, is the new freedom we hear tell of,
And very sensible No state can build
A literature that shall at once be sound
And sad on a foundation of well-being

To show the level of intelligence
Among us it was just a Warren farmer
Whose horse had pulled him short up in the road
By me, a stranger This is what he said,
From nothing but embarrassment and want
Of anything more sociable to say
'You hear those hound-dogs sing on Moosilauke?
Well they remind me of the hue and cry
We've heard against the Mid-Victorians
And never rightly understood till Bryan
Retired from politics and joined the chorus
The matter with the Mid-Victorians
Seems to have been a man named John L. Darwin'
'Go 'long,' I said to him, he to his horse

I knew a man who failing as a farmer
Burned down his farmhouse for the fire insurance,
And spent the proceeds on a telescope
To satisfy a life-long curiosity
About our place among the infinities
And how was that for other-worldliness?

If I must choose which I would elevate—
The people or the already lofty mountains,
I'd elevate the already lofty mountains
The only fault I find with old New Hampshire
Is that her mountains aren't quite high enough
I was not always so, I've come to be so
How, to my sorrow, how have I attained
A height from which to look down critical
On mountains? What has given me assurance
To say what height becomes New Hampshire mountains,
Or any mountains? Can it be some strength
I feel as of an earthquake in my back
To heave them higher to the morning star?
Can it be foreign travel in the Alps?
Or having seen and credited a moment
The solid moulding of vast peaks of cloud
Behind the pitiful reality
Of Lincoln, Lafayette and Liberty?
Or some such sense as says how high shall jet
The fountain in proportion to the basin?
No, none of these has raised me to my throne
Of intellectual dissatisfaction,
But the sad accident of having seen
Our actual mountains given in a map
Of early times as twice the height they are—
Ten thousand feet instead of only five—
Which shows how sad an accident may be
Five thousand is no longer high enough
Whereas I never had a good idea

About improving people in the world,
Here I am over-fertile in suggestion,
And cannot rest from planning day or night
How high I'd thrust the peaks in summer snow
To tap the upper sky and draw a flow
Of frosty night air on the vale below
Down from the stars to freeze the dew as starry

The more the sensibilitist I am
The more I seem to want my mountains wild,
The way the wiry gang-boss liked the log-jam.
After he'd picked the lock and got it started,
He dodged a log that lifted like an arm
Against the sky to break his back for him,
Then came in dancing, skipping, with his life
Across the roar and chaos, and the words
We saw him say along the zigzag journey
Were doubtless as the words we heard him say
On coming nearer 'Wasn't she an i-deal
Son-of-a-bitch? You bet she was an i-deal'

For all her mountains fall a little short,
Her people not quite short enough for Art,
She's still New Hampshire, a most restful state

Lately in converse with a New York alec
About the new school of the pseudo-phallic,
I found myself in a close corner where
I had to make an almost funny choice
'Choose you which you will be—a prude, or puke,

Mewling and puking in the public arms '
'Me for the hills where I don't have to choose '
'But if you had to choose, which would you be?'
I wouldn't be a prude afraid of nature
I know a man who took a double axe
And went alone against a grove of trees,
But his heart failing him, he dropped the axe
And ran for shelter quoting Matthew Arnold
'Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood,
There's been enough shed without shedding mine
Remember Birnam Wood! The wood's in flux!'
He had a special terror of the flux
That showed itself in dendrophobia
The only decent tree had been to mill
And educated into boards, he said
He knew too well for any earthly use
The line where man leaves off and nature starts,
And never over-stepped it save in dreams
He stood on the safe side of the line talking,
Which is sheer Matthew Arnoldism,
The cult of one who owned himself 'a foiled,
Circuitous wanderer,' and 'took dejectedly
His seat upon the intellectual throne '
Agreed in frowning on these improvised
Altars the woods are full of nowadays,
Again as in the days when Ahaz sinned
By worship under green trees in the open
Scarcely a mile but that I come on one,
A black-cheeked stone and stick of rain washed charcoal

Even to say the groves were God's first temples
Comes too near to Ahaz' sin for safety
Nothing not built with hands of course is sacred.
But here is not a question of what's sacred,
Rather of what to face or run away from
I'd hate to be a runaway from nature
And neither would I choose to be a puke
Who cares not what he does in company,
And, when he can't do anything, falls back
On words, and tries his worst to make words speak
Louder than actions, and sometimes achieves it
It seems a narrow choice the age insists on
How about being a good Greek, for instance?
That course, they tell me, isn't offered this year
'Come, but this isn't choosing—puke or prude?'
Well, if I have to choose one or the other,
I choose to be a plain New Hampshire farmer
With an income in cash of say a thousand
(From say a publisher in New York City)
It's restful to arrive at a decision,
And restful just to think about New Hampshire.
At present I am living in Vermont

A STAR IN A STONE-BOAT

(For Lincoln MacVeagh)

Never tell me that not one star of all
That slip from heaven at night and softly fall
Has been picked up with stones to build a wall

Some laborer found one faded and stone cold,
And saving that its weight suggested gold,
And tugged it from his first too certain hold,

He noticed nothing in it to remark
He was not used to handling stars thrown dark
And lifeless from an interrupted arc

He did not recognize in that smooth coal
The one thing palpable besides the soul
To penetrate the air in which we roll

He did not see how like a flying thing
It brooded ant-eggs, and had one large wing,
One not so large for flying in a ring,

And a long Bird of Paradise's tail,
(Though these when not in use to fly and trail
It drew back in its body like a snail),

Nor know that he might move it from the spot,
The harm was done, from having been star-shot
The very nature of the soil was hot

And burning to yield flowers instead of grain,
Flowers fanned and not put out by all the rain
Poured on them by his prayers prayed in vain

He moved it roughly with an iron bar,
He loaded an old stone-boat with the star
And not, as you might think, a flying car,

Such as even poets would admit perforce
More practical than Pegasus the horse
If it could put a star back in its course

He dragged it through the ploughed ground at a pace
But faintly reminiscent of the race
Of jostling rock in interstellar space

It went for building stone, and I, as though
Commanded in a dream, forever go
To right the wrong that this should have been so

Yet ask where else it could have gone as well,
I do not know—I cannot stop to tell
He might have left it lying where it fell

From following walls I never lift my eye
Except at night to places in the sky
Where showers of charted meteors let fly

Some may know what they seek in school and church,
And why they seek it there, for what I search
I must go measuring stone walls, perch on perch,

Sure that though not a star of death and birth,
So not to be compared, perhaps, in worth
To such resorts of life as Mars and Earth,

Though not, I say, a star of death and sin,
It yet has poles, and only needs a spin
To show its worldly nature and begin

To chafe and shuffle in my calloused palm
And run off in strange tangents with my arm
As fish do with the line in first alarm

Such as it is, it promises the prize
Of the one world complete in any size
That I am like to compass, fool or wise

THE CENSUS-TAKER

I came an errand one cloud-blowing evening
To a slab-built, black-paper-covered house
Of one room and one window and one door,
The only dwelling in a waste cut over
A hundred square miles round it in the mountains
And that not dwelt in now by men or women
(It never had been dwelt in, though, by women,
So what is this I make a sorrow of?)
I came as census-taker to the waste
To count the people in it and found none,
None in the hundred miles, none in the house,
Where I came last with some hope, but not much
After hours' overlooking from the cliffs
An emptiness flayed to the very stone
I found no people that dared show themselves,
None not in hiding from the outward eye
The time was autumn, but how anyone
Could tell the time of year when every tree
That could have dropped a leaf was down itself
And nothing but the stump of it was left
Now bringing out its rings in sugar of pitch,
And every tree up stood a rotting trunk
Without a single leaf to spend on autumn,
Or branch to whistle after what was spent
Perhaps the wind the more without the help
Of breathing trees said something of the time
Of year or day the way it swung a door

Forever off the latch, as if rude men
Passed in and slammed it shut each one behind him
For the next one to open for himself
I counted nine I had no right to count
(But this was dreamy unofficial counting)
Before I made the tenth across the threshold
Where was my supper? Where was anyone's?
No lamp was lit Nothing was on the table
The stove was cold—the stove was off the chimney—
And down by one side where it lacked a leg
The people that had loudly passed the door
Were people to the ear but not the eye
They were not on the table with their elbows
They were not sleeping in the shelves of bunks
I saw no men there and no bones of men there
I armed myself against such bones as might be
With the pitch-blackened stub of an axe-handle
I picked up off the straw-dust covered floor
Not bones, but the ill-fitted window rattled
The door was still because I held it shut
While I thought what to do that could be done—
About the house—about the people not there
This house in one year fallen to decay
Filled me with no less sorrow than the houses
Fallen to ruin in ten thousand years
Where Asia wedges Africa from Europe
Nothing was left to do that I could see
Unless to find that there was no one there
And declare to the cliffs too far for echo,
'The place is desert and let whoso lurks

In silence, if in this he is aggrieved,
Break silence now or be forever silent
Let him say why it should not be declared so '
The melancholy of having to count souls
Where they grow fewer and fewer every year
Is extreme where they shrink to none at all
It must be I want life to go on living

'You know Orion always comes up sideways
Throwing a leg up over our fence of mountains,
And rising on his hands, he looks in on me
Busy outdoors by lantern-light with something
I should have done by daylight, and indeed,
After the ground is frozen, I should have done
Before it froze, and a gust flings a handful
Of waste leaves at my smoky lantern chimney
To make fun of my way of doing things,
Or else fun of Orion's having caught me
Has a man, I should like to ask, no rights
These forces are obliged to pay respect to?'
So Brad McLaughlin mingled reckless talk
Of heavenly stars with hugger-mugger farming,
Till having failed at hugger-mugger farming,
He burned his house down for the fire insurance
And spent the proceeds on a telescope
To satisfy a life-long curiosity
About our place among the infinities

'What do you want with one of those blame things?'
I asked him well beforehand 'Don't you get one!'
'Don't call it blamed, there isn't anything
More blameless in the sense of being less
A weapon in our human fight,' he said
'I'll have one if I sell my farm to buy it'
There where he moved the rocks to plow the ground

And plowed between the rocks he couldn't move,
Few farms changed hands, so rather than spend years
Trying to sell his farm and then not selling,
He burned his house down for the fire insurance
And bought the telescope with what it came to
He had been heard to say by several
'The best thing that we're put here for's to see,
The strongest thing that's given us to see with's
A telescope Someone in every town
Seems to me owes it to the town to keep one
In Littleton it may as well be me '
After such loose talk it was no surprise
When he did what he did and burned his house down

Mean laughter went about the town that day
To let him know we weren't the least imposed on,
And he could wait—we'd see to him to-morrow
But the first thing next morning we reflected
If one by one we counted people out
For the least sin, it wouldn't take us long
To get so we had no one left to live with
For to be social is to be forgiving
Our thief, the one who does our stealing from us,s,
We don't cut off from coming to church supper
But what we miss we go to him and ask for
He promptly gives it back, that is if still
Uneaten, unworn out, or undisposed of
It wouldn't do to be too hard on Brad
About his telescope Beyond the age
Of being given one's gift for Christmas,

He had to take the best way he knew how
To find himself in one Well, all we said was
He took a strange thing to be roguish over
Some sympathy was wasted on the house,
A good old-timer dating back along,
But a house isn't sentient, the house
Didn't feel anything And if it did,
Why not regard it as a sacrifice,
And an old-fashioned sacrifice by fire,
Instead of a new-fashioned one at auction?

Out of a house and so out of a farm
At one stroke (of a match), Brad had to turn
To earn a living on the Concord railroad,
As under-ticket-agent at a station
Where his job, when he wasn't selling tickets,
Was setting out up track and down, not plants
As on a farm, but planets, evening stars
That varied in their hue from red to green

He got a good glass for six hundred dollars
His new job gave him leisure for star-gazing
Often he bid me come and have a look
Up the brass barrel, velvet black inside,
At a star quaking in the other end
I recollect a night of broken clouds
And underfoot snow melted down to ice,
And melting further in the wind to mud
Bradford and I had out the telescope
We spread our two legs as we spread its three,

Pointed our thoughts the way we pointed it,
And standing at our leisure till the day broke,
Said some of the best things we ever said
That telescope was christened the Star-splitter,
Because it didn't do a thing but split
A star in two or three the way you split
A globule of quicksilver in your hand
With one stroke of your finger in the middle
It's a star-splitter if there ever was one
And ought to do some good if splitting stars
'Sa thing to be compared with splitting wood
We've looked and looked, but after all where are we?
Do we know any better where we are,
And how it stands between the night to-night
And a man with a smoky lantern chimney?
How different from the way it ever stood?

THE AXE-HELVE

I've known ere now an interfering branch
Of alder catch my lifted axe behind me
But that was in the woods, to hold my hand
From striking at another alder's roots,
And that was, as I say, an alder branch
This was a man, Baptiste, who stole one day
Behind me on the snow in my own yard
Where I was working at the chopping-block,
And cutting nothing not cut down already
He caught my axe expertly on the rise,
When all my strength put forth was in his favor,
Held it a moment where it was, to calm me,
Then took it from me—and I let him take it
I didn't know him well enough to know
What it was all about There might be something
He had in mind to say to a bad neighbor
He might prefer to say to him disarmed
But all he had to tell me in French-English
Was what he thought of—not me, but my axe,
Me only as I took my axe to heart
It was the bad axe-helve some one had sold me—
'Made on machine,' he said, ploughing the grain
With a thick thumbnail to show how it ran
Across the handle's long drawn serpentine,
Like the two strokes across a dollar sign
'You give her one good crack, she's snap raght off
Den where's your hax-ead flying t'rough de hair?'
Admitted, and yet, what was that to him?

'Come on my house and I put you one in
What's las' awhile—good hick'ry what's grow
crooked,
De second growt' I cut myself—tough, tough!'
Something to sell? That wasn't how it sounded

'Den when you say you come? It's cost you nothing
To-naght?'

As well to-night as any night

Beyond an over-warmth of kitchen stove
My welcome differed from no other welcome
Baptiste knew best why I was where I was
So long as he would leave enough unsaid,
I shouldn't mind his being overjoyed
(If overjoyed he was) at having got me
Where I must judge if what he knew about an axe
That not everybody else knew was to count
For nothing in the measure of a neighbor
Hard if, though cast away for life with Yankees,
A Frenchman couldn't get his human rating!

Mrs Baptiste came in and rocked a chair
That had as many motions as the world
One back and forward, in and out of shadow,
That got her nowhere, one more gradual,
Sideways, that would have run her on the stove
In time, had she not realized her danger
And caught herself up bodily, chair and all,

And set herself back where she started from
'She ain't spick too much Henglish—dat's too bad '

I was afraid, in brightening first on me,
Then on Baptiste, as if she understood
What passed between us, she was only feigning
Baptiste was anxious for her, but no more
Than for himself, so placed he couldn't hope
To keep his bargain of the morning with me
In time to keep me from suspecting him
Of really never having meant to keep it

Needlessly soon he had his axe-helves out,
A quiverful to choose from, since he wished me
To have the best he had, or had to spare—
Not for me to ask which, when what he took
Had beauties he had to point me out at length
To insure their not being wasted on me
He liked to have it slender as a whipstock,
Free from the least knot, equal to the strain
Of bending like a sword across the knee
He showed me that the lines of a good helve
Were native to the grain before the knife
Expressed them, and its curves were no false curves
Put on it from without And there its strength lay
For the hard work He chafed its long white body
From end to end with his rough hand shut round it
He tried it at the eye-hole in the axe-head
'Hahn, hahn,' he mused, 'don't need much taking
down '

Baptiste knew how to make a short job long
For love of it, and yet not waste time either

Do you know, what we talked about was knowledge?
Baptiste on his defence about the children
He kept from school, or did his best to keep—
Whatever school and children and our doubts
Of laid-on education had to do
With the curves of his axe-helves and his having
Used these unscrupulously to bring me
To see for once the inside of his house
Was I desired in friendship, partly as some one
To leave it to, whether the right to hold
Such doubts of education should depend
Upon the education of those who held them?

But now he brushed the shavings from his knee
And stood the axe there on its horse's hoof,
Erect, but not without its waves, as when
The snake stood up for evil in the Garden,—
Top-heavy with a heaviness his short,
Thick hand made light of, steel-blue chin drawn down
And in a little—a French touch in that
Baptiste drew back and squinted at it, pleased,
'See how she's cock her head!'

THE GRINDSTONE

Having a wheel and four legs of its own
Has never availed the cumbersome grindstone
To get it anywhere that I can see
These hands have helped it go, and even race,
Not all the motion, though, they ever lent,
Not all the miles it may have thought it went,
Have got it one step from the starting place
It stands beside the same old apple tree
The shadow of the apple tree is thin
Upon it now, its feet are fast in snow
All other farm machinery's gone in,
And some of it on no more legs and wheel
Than the grindstone can boast to stand or go
(I'm thinking chiefly of the wheelbarrow)
For months it hasn't known the taste of steel,
Washed down with rusty water in a tin
But standing outdoors hungry, in the cold,
Except in towns at night, is not a sin
And, anyway, its standing in the yard
Under a ruinous live apple tree
Has nothing any more to do with me,
Except that I remember how of old
One summer day, all day I drove it hard,
And someone mounted on it rode it hard,
And he and I between us ground a blade

I gave it the preliminary spin,
And poured on water (tears it might have been),

And when it almost gayly jumped and flowed,
A Father-Time-like man got on and rode,
Armed with a scythe and spectacles that glowed
He turned on will-power to increase the load
And slow me down—and I abruptly slowed,
Like coming to a sudden railroad station
I changed from hand to hand in desperation
I wondered what machine of ages gone
This represented an improvement on
For all I knew it may have sharpened spears
And arrowheads itself Much use for years
Had gradually worn it an oblate
Spheroid that kicked and struggled in its gait,[1]
Appearing to return me hate for hate,
(But I forgive it now as easily
As any other boyhood enemy
Whose pride has failed to get him anywhere)
I wondered who it was the man thought ground—
The one who held the wheel back or the one
Who gave his life to keep it going round?
I wondered if he really thought it fair
For him to have the say when we were done
Such were the bitter thoughts to which I turned

Not for myself was I so much concerned
Oh no![1]—although, of course, I could have found
A better way to pass the afternoon
Than grinding discord out of a grindstone,
And beating insects at their gritty tune
Nor was I for the man so much concerned

Once when the grindstone almost jumped its bearing
It looked as if he might be badly thrown
And wounded on his blade So far from caring,
I laughed inside, and only cranked the faster,
(It ran as if it wasn't greased but glued),
I'd welcome any moderate disaster
That might be calculated to postpone
What evidently nothing could conclude
The thing that made me more and more afraid
Was that we'd ground it sharp and hadn't known
And now were only wasting precious blade
And when he raised it dripping once and tried
The creepy edge of it with wary touch,
And viewed it over his glasses funny-eyed,
Only disinterestedly to decide
It needed a turn more, I could have cried
Wasn't there danger of a turn too much?
Mightn't we make it worse instead of better?
I was for leaving something to the whetter
What if it wasn't all it should be? I'd
Be satisfied if he'd be satisfied

PAUL'S WIFE

To drive Paul out of any lumber camp
All that was needed was to say to him,
'How is the wife, Paul?'—and he'd disappear
Some said it was because he had no wife,
And hated to be twitted on the subject
Others because he'd come within a day
Or so of having one, and then been jilted
Others because he'd had one once, a good one,
Who'd run away with some one else and left him
And others still because he had one now
He only had to be reminded of,—
He was all duty to her in a minute
He had to run right off to look her up,
As if to say, 'That's so, how is my wife?
I hope she isn't getting into mischief'
No one was anxious to get rid of Paul
He'd been the hero of the mountain camps
Ever since, just to show them, he had slipped
The bark of a whole tamarack off whole,
As clean as boys do off a willow twig
To make a willow whistle on a Sunday
In April by subsiding meadow brooks
They seemed to ask him just to see him go,
'How is the wife, Paul?' and he always went
He never stopped to murder anyone
Who asked the question He just disappeared—
Nobody knew in what direction,
Although it wasn't usually long

Before they heard of him in some new camp,
The same Paul at the same old feats of logging
The question everywhere was why should Paul
Object to being asked a civil question—
A man you could say almost anything to
Short of a fighting word You have the answers
And there was one more not so fair to Paul
That Paul had married a wife not his equal
Paul was ashamed of her To match a hero,
She would have had to be a heroine,
Instead of which she was some half-breed squaw
But if the story Murphy told was true,
She wasn't anything to be ashamed of

You know Paul could do wonders Everyone's
Heard how he thrashed the horses on a load
That wouldn't budge until they simply stretched
Their rawhide harness from the load to camp
Paul told the boss the load would be all right,
'The sun will bring your load in'—and it did—
By shrinking the rawhide to natural length
That's what is called a stretcher But I guess
The one about his jumping so's to land
With both his feet at once against the ceiling,
And then land safely right side up again,
Back on the floor, is fact or pretty near fact
Well this is such a yarn Paul sawed his wife
Out of a white-pine log Murphy was there,
And, as you might say, saw the lady born
Paul worked at anything in lumbering

He'd been hard at it taking boards away
For—I forget—the last ambitious sawyer
To want to find out if he couldn't pile
The lumber on Paul till Paul begged for mercy
They'd sliced the first slab off a big butt log,
And the sawyer had slammed the carriage back
To slam end on again against the saw teeth
To judge them by the way they caught themselves
When they saw what had happened to the log,
They must have had a guilty expectation
Something was going to go with their slambanging.
Something had left a broad black streak of grease
On the new wood the whole length of the log
Except, perhaps, a foot at either end
But when Paul put his finger in the grease,
It wasn't grease at all, but a long slot
The log was hollow They were sawing pine
'First time I ever saw a hollow pine
That comes of having Paul around the place
Take it to hell for me,' the sawyer said
Everyone had to have a look at it,
And tell Paul what he ought to do about it
(They treated it as his) 'You take a jack-knife,
And spread the opening, and you've got a dug-out
All dug to go a-fishing in ' To Paul
The hollow looked too sound and clean and empty
Ever to have housed birds or beasts or bees
There was no entrance for them to get in by
It looked to him like some new kind of hollow
He thought he'd *better* take his jack-knife to

So after work that evening he came back
And let enough light into it by cutting
To see if it was empty He made out in there
A slender length of pith, or was it pith?
It might have been the skin a snake had cast
And left stood up on end inside the tree
The hundred years the tree must have been growing
More cutting and he had this in both hands,
And, looking from it to the pond near by,
Paul wondered how it would respond to water
Not a breeze stirred, but just the breath of air
He made in walking slowly to the beach
Blew it once off his hands and almost broke it
He laid it at the edge where it could drink
At the first drink it rustled and grew limp
At the next drink it grew invisible
Paul dragged the shallows for it with his fingers,
And thought it must have melted It was gone
And then beyond the open water, dim with midges,
Where the log drive lay pressed against the boom,
It slowly rose a person, rose a girl,
Her wet hair heavy on her like a helmet,
Who, leaning on a log looked back at Paul
And that made Paul in turn look back
To see if it was anyone behind him
That she was looking at instead of him
Murphy had been there watching all the time,
But from a shed where neither of them could see him
There was a moment of suspense in birth
When the girl seemed too water-logged to live,
Before she caught her first breath with a gasp

And laughed Then she climbed slowly to her feet,
And walked off talking to herself or Paul
Across the logs like backs of alligators,
Paul taking after her around the pond

Next evening Murphy and some other fellows
Got drunk, and tracked the pair up Catamount,
From the bare top of which there is a view
To other hills across a kettle valley
And there, well after dark, let Murphy tell it,
They saw Paul and his creature keeping house
It was the only glimpse that anyone
Has had of Paul and her since Murphy saw them
Falling in love across the twilight mill-pond
More than a mile across the wilderness
They sat together half-way up a cliff
In a small niche let into it, the girl
Brightly, as if a star played on the place,
Paul darkly, like her shadow All the light
Was from the girl herself, though, not from a star,
As was apparent from what happened next
All those great ruffians put their throats together,
And let out a loud yell, and threw a bottle,
As a brute tribute of respect to beauty
Of course the bottle fell short by a mile,
But the shout reached the girl and put her light out,
She went out like a firefly, and that was all

So there were witnesses that Paul was married,
And not to anyone to be ashamed of
Everyone had been wrong in judging Paul

Murphy told me Paul put on all those airs
About his wife to keep her to himself
Paul was what's called a terrible possessor
Owning a wife with him meant owning her
She wasn't anybody else's business,
Either to praise her, or so much as name her,
And he'd thank people not to think of her
Murphy's idea was that a man like Paul
Wouldn't be spoken to about a wife
In any way the world knew how to speak

WILD GRAPES

What tree may not the fig be gathered from?
The grape may not be gathered from the birch?
It's all you know the grape, or know the birch
As a girl gathered from the birch myself
Equally with my weight in grapes, one autumn,
I ought to know what tree the grape is fruit of.
I was born, I suppose, like anyone,
And grew to be a little boyish girl
My brother could not always leave at home
But that beginning was wiped out in fear
The day I swung suspended with the grapes,
And was come after like Eurydice
And brought down safely from the upper regions,
And the life I live now's an extra life
I can waste as I please on whom I please
So if you see me celebrate two birthdays,
And give myself out as two different ages,
One of them five years younger than I look—

One day my brother led me to a glade
Where a white birch he knew of stood alone,
Wearing a thin head-dress of pointed leaves,
And heavy on her heavy hair behind,
Against her neck, an ornament of grapes
Grapes, I knew grapes from having seen them last
year
One bunch of them, and there began to be

Bunches all round me growing in white birches,
The way they grew round Lief the Lucky's German,
Mostly as much beyond my lifted hands, though,
As the moon used to seem when I was younger,
And only freely to be had for climbing
My brother did the climbing, and at first
Threw me down grapes to miss and scatter
And have to hunt for in sweet fern and hardhack,
Which gave him some time to himself to eat,
But not so much, perhaps, as a boy needed
So then, to make me wholly self-supporting,
He climbed still higher and bent the tree to earth,
And put it in my hands to pick my own grapes
'Here, take a tree-top, I'll get down another
Hold on with all your might when I let go'
I said I had the tree It wasn't true
The opposite was true The tree had me
The minute it was left with me alone
It caught me up as if I were the fish
And it the fishpole So I was translated
To loud cries from my brother of 'Let go!
Don't you know anything, you girl? Let go!'
But I, with something of the baby grip
Acquired ancestrally in just such trees
When wilder mothers than our wildest now
Hung babies out on branches by the hands
To dry or wash or tan, I don't know which
(You'll have to ask an evolutionist)—
I held on uncomplainingly for life
My brother tried to make me laugh to help me

'What are you doing up there in those grapes?
Don't be afraid A few of them won't hurt you
I mean, they won't pick you if you don't them '
Much danger of my picking anything!
By that time I was pretty well reduced
To a philosophy of hang-and-let-hang
'Now you know how it feels,' my brother said,
'To be a bunch of fox-grapes, as they call them,
That when it thinks it has escaped the fox
By growing where it shouldn't—on a birch,
Where a fox wouldn't think to look for it—
And if he looked and found it, couldn't reach it—
Just then come you and I to gather it
Only you have the advantage of the grapes
In one way you have one more stem to cling by,
And promise more resistance to the picker '

One by one I lost off my hat and shoes,
And still I clung I let my head fall back,
And shut my eyes against the sun, my ears
Against my brother's nonsense, 'Drop,' he said,
'I'll catch you in my arms It isn't far '
(Stated in lengths of him it might not be)
'Drop or I'll shake the tree and shake you down '
Grim silence on my part as I sank lower,
My small wrists stretching till they showed the banjo strings
'Why, if she isn't serious about it!
Hold tight awhile till I think what to do
I'll bend the tree down and let you down by it '

I don't know much about the letting down,
But once I felt ground with my stocking feet
And the world came revolving back to me,
I know I looked long at my curled-up fingers,
Before I straightened them and brushed the bark off
My brother said 'Don't you weigh anything?
Try to weigh something next time, so you won't
Be run off with by birch trees into space'

It wasn't my not weighing anything
So much as my not knowing anything—
My brother had been nearer right before
I had not taken the first step in knowledge,
I had not learned to let go with the hands,
As still I have not learned to with the heart,
And have no wish to with the heart—nor need,
That I can see The mind—is not the heart
I may yet live, as I know others live,
To wish in vain to let go with the mind—
Of cares, at night, to sleep, but nothing tells me
That I need learn to let go with the heart

I staid the night for shelter at a farm
Behind the mountain, with a mother and son,
Two old-believers They did all the talking

MOTHER Folks think a witch who has familiar spirits
She could call up to pass a winter evening,
But won't, should be burned at the stake or something
Summoning spirits isn't 'Button, button,
Who's got the button,' I would have them know

SON Mother can make a common table rear
And kick with two legs like an army mule

MOTHER And when I've done it, what good have I done?
Rather than tip a table for you, let me
Tell you what Ralle the Sioux Control once told me
He said the dead had souls, but when I asked him
How could that be—I thought the dead were souls,
He broke my trance Don't that make you suspicious
That there's something the dead are keeping back?
Yes, there's something the dead are keeping back

SON You wouldn't want to tell him what we have
Up attic, mother?

MOTHER Bones—a skeleton

SON But the headboard of mother's bed is pushed
Against the attic door the door is nailed
It's harmless Mother hears it in the night
Halting perplexed behind the barrier
Of door and headboard Where it wants to get
Is back into the cellar where it came from

MOTHER We'll never let them, will we, son! We'll never!

SON It left the cellar forty years ago
And carried itself like a pile of dishes
Up one flight from the cellar to the kitchen,
Another from the kitchen to the bedroom,
Another from the bedroom to the attic,
Right past both father and mother, and neither stopped it
Father had gone upstairs, mother was downstairs
I was a baby I don't know where I was

MOTHER The only fault my husband found with me—
I went to sleep before I went to bed,
Especially in winter when the bed
Might just as well be ice and the clothes snow
The night the bones came up the cellar-stairs
Toffile had gone to bed alone and left me,
But left an open door to cool the room off
So as to sort of turn me out of it

I was just coming to myself enough
To wonder where the cold was coming from,
When I heard Toffile upstairs in the bedroom
And thought I heard him downstairs in the cellar
The board we had laid down to walk dry-shod on
When there was water in the cellar in spring
Struck the hard cellar bottom And then someone
Began the stairs, two footsteps for each step,
The way a man with one leg and a crutch,
Or a little child, comes up It wasn't Toffile
It wasn't anyone who could be there
The bulkhead double-doors were double-locked
And swollen tight and buried under snow
The cellar windows were banked up with sawdust
And swollen tight and buried under snow
It was the bones I knew them—and good reason
My first impulse was to get to the knob
And hold the door But the bones didn't try
The door, they halted helpless on the landing,
Waiting for things to happen in their favor
The faintest restless rustling ran all through them.
I never could have done the thing I did
If the wish hadn't been too strong in me
To see how they were mounted for this walk
I had a vision of them put together
Not like a man, but like a chandelier
So suddenly I flung the door wide on him
A moment he stood balancing with emotion,
And all but lost himself (A tongue of fire

Flashed out and licked along his upper teeth
Smoke rolled inside the sockets of his eyes)
Then he came at me with one hand outstretched,
The way he did in life once, but this time
I struck the hand off brittle on the floor,
And fell back from him on the floor myself
The finger-pieces slid in all directions
(Where did I see one of those pieces lately?
Hand me my button-box—it must be there)
I sat up on the floor and shouted, 'Toffile,
It's coming up to you ' It had its choice
Of the door to the cellar or the hall
It took the hall door for the novelty,
And set off briskly for so slow a thing,
Still going every which way in the joints, though,
So that it looked like lightning or a scribble,
From the slap I had just now given its hand
I listened till it almost climbed the stairs
From the hall to the only finished bedroom,
Before I got up to do anything,
Then ran and shouted, 'Shut the bedroom door,
Toffile, for my sake!' 'Company?' he said,
'Don't make me get up, I'm too warm in bed '
So lying forward weakly on the handrail
I pushed myself upstairs, and in the light
(The kitchen had been dark) I had to own
I could see nothing 'Toffile, I don't see it
It's with us in the room though It's the bones '
'What bones?' 'The cellar bones—out of the grave '

That made him throw his bare legs out of bed
And sit up by me and take hold of me
I wanted to put out the light and see
If I could see it, or else mow the room,
With our arms at the level of our knees,
And bring the chalk-pile down 'I'll tell you what—
It's looking for another door to try
The uncommonly deep snow has made him think
Of his old song, *The Wild Colonial Boy,*
He always used to sing along the tote-road
He's after an open door to get out-doors
Let's trap him with an open door up attic'
Toffile agreed to that, and sure enough,
Almost the moment he was given an opening,
The steps began to climb the attic stairs
I heard them Toffile didn't seem to hear them
'Quick!' I slammed to the door and held the knob,
'Toffile, get nails.' I made him nail the door shut
And push the headboard of the bed against it
Then we asked was there anything
Up attic that we'd ever want again
The attic was less to us than the cellar.
If the bones liked the attic, let them have it
Let them stay in the attic When they sometimes
Come down the stairs at night and stand perplexed
Behind the door and headboard of the bed,
Brushing their chalky skull with chalky fingers,
With sounds like the dry rattling of a shutter,
That's what I sit up in the dark to say—

To no one any more since Toffile died
Let them stay in the attic since they went there
I promised Toffile to be cruel to them
For helping them be cruel once to him

SON We think they had a grave down in the cellar

MOTHER We know they had a grave down in the cellar

SON We never could find out whose bones they were

MOTHER Yes, we could too, son Tell the truth for once
They were a man's his father killed for me
I mean a man he killed instead of me
The least I could do was to help dig their grave
We were about it one night in the cellar
Son knows the story but 'twas not for him
To tell the truth, suppose the time had come
Son looks surprised to see me end a lie
We'd kept all these years between ourselves
So as to have it ready for outsiders
But tonight I don't care enough to lie—
I don't remember why I ever cared
Toffile, if he were here, I don't believe
Could tell you why he ever cared himself

She hadn't found the finger-bone she wanted
Among the buttons poured out in her lap
I verified the name next morning Toffile
The rural letter-box said Toffile Lajway

AN EMPTY THREAT

I stay,
But it isn't as if
There wasn't always Hudson's Bay
And the fur trade,
A small skiff
And a paddle blade

I can just see my tent pegged,
And me on the floor,
Crosslegged,
And a trapper looking in at the door
With furs to sell

His name's Joe,
Alias John,
And between what he doesn't know
And won't tell
About where Henry Hudson's gone,
I can't say he's much help,
But we get on

The seal yelp
On an ice cake
It's not men by some mistake?

No,
There's not a soul

For a wind-break
Between me and the North Pole—

Except always John-Joe,
My French Indian Esquimaux
And he's off setting traps,
In one himself perhaps

Give a head shake
Over so much bay
Thrown away
In snow and mist
That doesn't exist,
I was going to say,
For God, man or beast's sake
Yet does perhaps for all three

Don't ask Joe
What it is to him
It's sometimes dim
What it is to me,
Unless it be
It's the old captain's dark fate
Who failed to find or force a strait
In its two-thousand-mile coast,
And his crew left him where he failed,
And nothing came of all he sailed

It's to say, 'You and I'
To such a ghost,

You and I
Off here
With the dead race of the Great Auk!'
And, 'Better defeat almost,
If seen clear,
Than life's victories of doubt
That need endless talk talk
To make them out '

FRAGMENTARY BLUE

Why make so much of fragmentary blue
In here and there a bird, or butterfly,
Or flower, or wearing-stone, or open eye,
When heaven presents in sheets the solid hue?

Since earth is earth, perhaps, not heaven (as yet)—
Though some savants make earth include the sky,
And blue so far above us comes so high,
It only gives our wish for blue a whet

FIRE AND ICE

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice

DUST OF SNOW

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

TO E T

I slumbered with your poems on my breast
Spread open as I dropped them half-read through
Like dove wings on a figure on a tomb
To see, if in a dream they brought of you,

I might not have the chance I missed in life
Through some delay, and call you to your face
First soldier, and then poet, and then both,
Who died a soldier-poet of your race

I meant, you meant, that nothing should remain
Unsaid between us, brother, and this remained—
And one thing more that was not then to say
The Victory for what it lost and gained

You went to meet the shell's embrace of fire
On Vimy Ridge, and when you fell that day
The war seemed over more for you than me,
But now for me than you—the other way

How over, though, for even me who knew
The foe thrust back unsafe beyond the Rhine,
If I was not to speak of it to you
And see you pleased once more with words of mine?

NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold
Her early leaf's a flower,
But only so an hour
Then leaf subsides to leaf
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day
Nothing gold can stay

THE RUNAWAY

Once when the snow of the year was beginning to
fall,
We stopped by a mountain pasture to say, 'Whose
colt?'
A little Morgan had one forefoot on the wall,
The other curled at his breast He dipped his head
And snorted at us And then he had to bolt
We heard the miniature thunder where he fled,
And we saw him, or thought we saw him, dim and
grey,
Like a shadow against the curtain of falling flakes
'I think the little fellow's afraid of the snow
He isn't winter-broken It isn't play
With the little fellow at all He's running away
I doubt if even his mother could tell him, "Sakes,
It's only weather" He'd think she didn't know!
Where is his mother? He can't be out alone'
And now he comes again with clatter of stone,
And mounts the wall again with whited eyes
And all his tail that isn't hair up straight
He shudders his coat as if to throw off flies
'Whoever it is that leaves him out so late,
When other creatures have gone to stall and bin,
Ought to be told to come and take him in'

THE AIM WAS SONG

Before man came to blow it right
 The wind once blew itself untaught,
And did its loudest day and night
 In any rough place where it caught

Man came to tell it what was wrong
 It hadn't found the place to blow,
It blew too hard—the aim was song
 And listen—how it ought to go!

He took a little in his mouth,
 And held it long enough for north
To be converted into south,
 And then by measure blew it forth

By measure It was word and note,
 The wind the wind had meant to be—
 A little through the lips and throat
 The aim was song—the wind could see

STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

Whose woods these are I think I know
His house is in the village though,
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake

The woods are lovely, dark and deep
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep

FOR ONCE, THEN, SOMETHING

Others taunt me with having knelt at well-curbs
Always wrong to the light, so never seeing
Deeper down in the well than where the water
Gives me back in a shining surface picture
Me myself in the summer heaven godlike
Looking out of a wreath of fern and cloud puffs
Once, when trying with chin against a well-curb,
I discerned, as I thought, beyond the picture,
Through the picture, a something white, uncertain,
Something more of the depths—and then I lost it
Water came to rebuke the too clear water
One drop fell from a fern, and lo, a ripple
Shook whatever it was lay there at bottom,
Blurred it, blotted it out What was that whiteness?
Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then, something

BLUE-BUTTERFLY DAY

It is blue-butterfly day here in spring,
And with these sky-flakes down in flurry on flurry
There is more unmixed color on the wing
Than flowers will show for days unless they hurry

But these are flowers that fly and all but sing
And now from having ridden out desire
They lie closed over in the wind and cling
Where wheels have freshly sliced the April mire

THE ONSET

Always the same, when on a fated night
At last the gathered snow lets down as white
As may be in dark woods, and with a song
It shall not make again all winter long
Of hissing on the yet uncovered ground,
I almost stumble looking up and round,
As one who overtaken by the end
Gives up his errand, and lets death descend
Upon him where he is, with nothing done
To evil, no important triumph won,
More than if life had never been begun

Yet all the precedent is on my side
I know that winter death has never tried
The earth but it has failed the snow may heap
In long storms an undrifted four feet deep
As measured against maple, birch and oak,
It cannot check the peeper's silver croak,
And I shall see the snow all go down hill
In water of a slender April rill
That flashes tail through last year's withered brake
And dead weeds, like a disappearing snake
Nothing will be left white but here a birch,
And there a clump of houses with a church

TO EARTHWARD

Love at the lips was touch
As sweet as I could bear,
And once that seemed too much,
I lived on air

That crossed me from sweet things,
The flow of—was it musk
From hidden grapevine springs
Down hill at dusk?

I had the swirl and ache
From sprays of honeysuckle
That when they're gathered shake
Dew on the knuckle

I craved strong sweets, but those
Seemed strong when I was young,
The petal of the rose
It was that stung

Now no joy but lacks salt
That is not dashed with pain
And weariness and fault,
I crave the stain

Of tears, the aftermark
Of almost too much love,

The sweet of bitter bark
And burning clove

When stiff and sore and scarred
I take away my hand
From leaning on it hard
In grass and sand,

The hurt is not enough
I long for weight and strength
To feel the earth as rough
To all my length

GOOD-BYE AND KEEP COLD

This saying good-bye on the edge of the dark
And the cold to an orchard so young in the bark
Reminds me of all that can happen to harm
An orchard away at the end of the farm
All winter, cut off by a hill from the house
I don't want it girdled by rabbit and mouse,
I don't want it dreamily nibbled for browse
By deer, and I don't want it budded by grouse
(If certain it wouldn't be idle to call
I'd summon grouse, rabbit, and deer to the wall
And warn them away with a stick for a gun)
I don't want it stirred by the heat of the sun
(We made it secure against being, I hope,
By setting it out on a northerly slope)
No orchard's the worse for the wintriest storm,
But one thing about it, it mustn't get warm
'How often already you've had to be told,
Keep cold, young orchard Good-bye and keep cold
Dread fifty above more than fifty below '
I have to be gone for a season or so
My business a while is with different trees,
Less carefully nurtured, less fruitful than these,
And such as is done to their wood with an axe—
Maples and birches and tamaracks
I wish I could promise to lie in the night
And think of an orchard's arboreal plight

When slowly (and nobody comes with a light)
Its heart sinks lower under the sod
But something has to be left to God

TWO LOOK AT TWO

Love and forgetting might have carried them
A little further up the mountain side
With night so near, but not much further up
They must have halted soon in any case
With thoughts of the path back, how rough it was
With rock and washout, and unsafe in darkness,
When they were halted by a tumbled wall
With barbed-wire binding They stood facing this,
Spending what onward impulse they still had
In one last look the way they must not go,
On up the failing path, where, if a stone
Or earthslide moved at night, it moved itself,
No footstep moved it 'This is all,' they sighed,
'Good-night to woods ' But not so, there was more
A doe from round a spruce stood looking at them
Across the wall, as near the wall as they
She saw them in their field, they her in hers
The difficulty of seeing what stood still,
Like some up-ended boulder split in two,
Was in her clouded eyes they saw no fear there
She seemed to think that two thus they were safe
Then, as if they were something that, though strange,
She could not trouble her mind with too long,
She sighed and passed unscared along the wall
'*This,* then, is all What more is there to ask?'
But no, not yet A snort to bid them wait
A buck from round the spruce stood looking at them

Across the wall as near the wall as they
This was an antlered buck of lusty nostril,
Not the same doe come back into her place
He viewed them quizzically with jerks of head,
As if to ask, 'Why don't you make some motion?
Or give some sign of life? Because you can't
I doubt if you're as living as you look '
Thus till he had them almost feeling dared
To stretch a proffering hand—and a spell-breaking
Then he too passed unscared along the wall
Two had seen two, whichever side you spoke from
'This *must* be all ' It was all Still they stood,
A great wave from it going over them,
As if the earth in one unlooked-for favor
Had made them certain earth returned their love

NOT TO KEEP

They sent him back to her The letter came
Saying And she could have him And before
She could be sure there was no hidden ill
Under the formal writing, he was in her sight,
Living They gave him back to her alive—
How else? They are not known to send the dead—
And not disfigured visibly His face?
His hands? She had to look, to ask,
'What is it, dear?' And she had given all
And still she had all—*they* had—they the lucky!
Wasn't she glad now? Everything seemed won,
And all the rest for them permissible ease
She had to ask, 'What was it, dear?'

'Enough,
Yet not enough A bullet through and through,
High in the breast Nothing but what good care
And medicine and rest, and you a week,
Can cure me of to go again ' The same
Grim giving to do over for them both
She dared no more than ask him with her eyes
How was it with him for a second trial
And with his eyes he asked her not to ask
They had given him back to her, but not to keep.

A BROOK IN THE CITY

The farm house lingers, though averse to square
With the new city street it has to wear
A number in But what about the brook
That held the house as in an elbow-crook?
I ask as one who knew the brook, its strength
And impulse, having dipped a finger length
And made it leap my knuckle, having tossed
A flower to try its currents where they crossed
The meadow grass could be cemented down
From growing under pavements of a town,
The apple trees be sent to hearth-stone flame.
Is water wood to serve a brook the same?
How else dispose of an immortal force
No longer needed? Staunch it at its source
With cinder loads dumped down? The brook was thrown
Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone
In fetid darkness still to live and run—
And all for nothing it had ever done
Except forget to go in fear perhaps
No one would know except for ancient maps
That such a brook ran water. But I wonder
If from its being kept forever under
The thoughts may not have risen that so keep
This new-built city from both work and sleep.

THE KITCHEN CHIMNEY

Builder, in building the little house,
In every way you may please yourself,
But please please me in the kitchen chimney
Don't build me a chimney upon a shelf

However far you must go for bricks,
Whatever they cost a-piece or a pound,
Buy me enough for a full-length chimney,
And build the chimney clear from the ground

It's not that I'm greatly afraid of fire,
But I never heard of a house that throve
(And I know of one that didn't thrive)
Where the chimney started above the stove

And I dread the ominous stain of tar
That there always is on the papered walls,
And the smell of fire drowned in rain
That there always is when the chimney's false

A shelf's for a clock or vase or picture,
But I don't see why it should have to bear
A chimney that only would serve to remind me
Of castles I used to build in air.

LOOKING FOR A SUNSET BIRD IN WINTER

The west was getting out of gold,
The breath of air had died of cold,
When shoeing home across the white,
I thought I saw a bird alight

In summer when I passed the place
I had to stop and lift my face,
A bird with an angelic gift
Was singing in it sweet and swift

No bird was singing in it now
A single leaf was on a bough,
And that was all there was to see
In going twice around the tree

From my advantage on a hill
I judged that such a crystal chill
Was only adding frost to snow
As gilt to gold that wouldn't show

A brush had left a crooked stroke
Of what was either cloud or smoke
From north to south across the blue,
A piercing little star was through.

GATHERING LEAVES

Spades take up leaves
No better than spoons,
And bags full of leaves
Are light as balloons

I make a great noise
Of rustling all day
Like rabbit and deer
Running away

But the mountains I raise
Elude my embrace,
Flowing over my arms
And into my face

I may load and unload
Again and again
Till I fill the whole shed,
And what have I then?

Next to nothing for weight;
And since they grew duller
From contact with earth,
Next to nothing for color.

Next to nothing for use
But a crop is a crop,
And who's to say where
The harvest shall stop?

MISGIVING

All crying 'We will go with you, O Wind!'
The foliage follow him, leaf and stem,
But a sleep oppresses them as they go,
And they end by bidding him stay with them

Since ever they flung abroad in spring
The leaves had promised themselves this flight,
Who now would fain seek sheltering wall,
Or thicket, or hollow place for the night

And now they answer his summoning blast
With an ever vaguer and vaguer stir,
Or at utmost a little reluctant whirl
That drops them no further than where they were

I only hope that when I am free
As they are free to go in quest
Of the knowledge beyond the bounds of life
It may not seem better to me to rest

PLOWMEN

A plow, they say, to plow the snow
They cannot mean to plant it, though—
Unless in bitterness to mock
At having cultivated rock

ON A TREE FALLEN ACROSS THE ROAD

(TO HEAR US TALK)

The tree the tempest with a crash of wood
Throws down in front of us is not to bar
Our passage to our journey's end for good,
But just to ask us who we think we are

Insisting always on our own way so
She likes to halt us in our runner tracks,
And make us get down in a foot of snow
Debating what to do without an axe

And yet she knows obstruction is in vain
We will not be put off the final goal
We have it hidden in us to attain,
Not though we have to seize earth by the pole

And, tired of aimless circling in one place,
Steer straight off after something into space

OUR SINGING STRENGTH

It snowed in spring on earth so dry and warm
The flakes could find no landing place to form
Hordes spent themselves to make it wet and cold,
And still they failed of any lasting hold
They made no white impression on the black
They disappeared as if earth sent them back
Not till from separate flakes they changed at night
To almost strips and tapes of ragged white
Did grass and garden ground confess it snowed,
And all go back to winter but the road
Next day the scene was piled and puffed and dead
The grass lay flattened under one great tread
Borne down until the end almost took root,
The rangey bough anticipated fruit
With snowballs cupped in every opening bud.
The road alone maintained itself in mud,
Whatever its secret was of greater heat
From inward fires or brush of passing feet

In spring more mortal singers than belong
To any one place cover us with song
Thrush, bluebird, blackbird, sparrow, and robin
throng;
Some to go further north to Hudson's Bay,
Some that have come too far north back away,
Really a very few to build and stay.
Now was seen how these liked belated snow.

The fields had nowhere left for them to go,
They'd soon exhausted all there was in flying,
The trees they'd had enough of with once trying
And setting off their heavy powder load
They could find nothing open but the road
So there they let their lives be narrowed in
By thousands the bad weather made akin
The road became a channel running flocks
Of glossy birds like ripples over rocks
I drove them under foot in bits of flight
That kept the ground, almost disputing right
Of way with me from apathy of wing,
A talking twitter all they had to sing
A few I must have driven to despair
Made quick asides, but having done in air
A whir among white branches great and small
As in some too much carven marble hall
Where one false wing beat would have brought down all,
Came tamely back in front of me, the Drover,
To suffer the same driven nightmare over
One such storm in a lifetime couldn't teach them
That back behind pursuit it couldn't reach them;
None flew behind me to be left alone

Well, something for a snowstorm to have shown
The country's singing strength thus brought together,
That though repressed and moody with the weather
Was none the less there ready to be freed
And sing the wildflowers up from root and seed.

THE NEED OF BEING VERSED IN COUNTRY THINGS

The house had gone to bring again
To the midnight sky a sunset glow
Now the chimney was all of the house that stood,
Like a pistil after the petals go

The barn opposed across the way,
That would have joined the house in flame
Had it been the will of the wind, was left
To bear forsaken the place's name

No more it opened with all one end
For teams that came by the stony road
To drum on the floor with scurrying hoofs
And brush the mow with the summer load

The birds that came to it through the air
At broken windows flew out and in,
Their murmur more like the sigh we sigh
From too much dwelling on what has been

Yet for them the lilac renewed its leaf,
And the aged elm, though touched with fire,
And the dry pump flung up an awkward arm,
And the fence post carried a strand of wire

For them there was really nothing sad
But though they rejoiced in the nest they kept,
One had to be versed in country things
Not to believe the phoebes wept

West-Running Brook

SPRING POOLS

These pools that, though in forests, still reflect
The total sky almost without defect,
And like the flowers beside them, chill and shiver,
Will like the flowers beside them soon be gone,
And yet not out by any brook or river,
But up by roots to bring dark foliage on

The trees that have it in their pent-up buds
To darken nature and be summer woods—
Let them think twice before they use their powers
To blot out and drink up and sweep away
These flowery waters and these watery flowers
From snow that melted only yesterday

THE FREEDOM OF THE MOON

I've tried the new moon tilted in the air
Above a hazy tree-and-farmhouse cluster
As you might try a jewel in your hair
I've tried it fine with little breadth of lustre,
Alone, or in one ornament combining
With one first-water star almost as shining.

I put it shining anywhere I please
By walking slowly on some evening later,
I've pulled it from a crate of crooked trees,
And brought it over glossy water, greater,
And dropped it in, and seen the image wallow,
The color run, all sorts of wonder follow

FIREFLIES IN THE GARDEN

Here come real stars to fill the upper skies,
And here on earth come emulating flies,
That though they never equal stars in size,
(And they were never really stars at heart)
Achieve at times a very star-like start
Only, of course, they can't sustain the part

ATMOSPHERE

INSCRIPTION FOR A GARDEN WALL

Winds blow the open grassy places bleak,
But where this old wall burns a sunny cheek,
They eddy over it too toppling weak
To blow the earth or anything self-clear,
Moisture and color and odor thicken here
The hours of daylight gather atmosphere

DEVOTION

The heart can think of no devotion
Greater than being shore to the ocean—
Holding the curve of one position,
Counting an endless repetition

ON GOING UNNOTICED

As vain to raise a voice as a sigh
In the tumult of free leaves on high
What are you in the shadow of trees
Engaged up there with the light and breeze?

Less than the coral-root you know
That is content with the daylight low,
And has no leaves at all of its own,
Whose spotted flowers hang meanly down

You grasp the bark by a rugged pleat,
And look up small from the forest's feet
The only leaf it drops goes wide
Your name not written on either side

You linger your little hour and are gone,
And still the woods sweep leafily on,
Not even missing the coral-root flower
You took as a trophy of the hour

A PASSING GLIMPSE

To Ridgely Torrence
On Last Looking Into His 'Hesperides'

I often see flowers from a passing car
That are gone before I can tell what they are

I want to get out of the train and go back
To see what they were beside the track

I name all the flowers I am sure they weren't
Not fireweed loving where woods have burnt—

Not blue bells gracing a tunnel mouth—
Not lupine living on sand and drouth

Was something brushed across my mind
That no one on earth will ever find?

Heaven gives its glimpses only to those
Not in position to look too close

A PECK OF GOLD

Dust always blowing about the town,
Except when sea-fog laid it down,
And I was one of the children told
Some of the blowing dust was gold

All the dust the wind blew high
Appeared like gold in the sunset sky,
But I was one of the children told
Some of the dust was really gold

Such was life in the Golden Gate
Gold dusted all we drank and ate,
And I was one of the children told,
'We all must eat our peck of gold'

ACCEPTANCE

When the spent sun throws up its rays on cloud
And goes down burning into the gulf below,
No voice in nature is heard to cry aloud
At what has happened Birds, at least, must know
It is the change to darkness in the sky
Murmuring something quiet in her breast,
One bird begins to close a faded eye,
Or overtaken too far from his nest,
Hurrying low above the grove, some waif
Swoops just in time to his remembered tree
At most he thinks or twitters softly, 'Safe!
Now let the night be dark for all of me
Let the night be too dark for me to see
Into the future Let what will be, be '

ONCE BY THE PACIFIC

The shattered water made a misty din
Great waves looked over others coming in,
And thought of doing something to the shore
That water never did to land before
The clouds were low and hairy in the skies,
Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes
You could not tell, and yet it looked as if
The shore was lucky in being backed by cliff,
The cliff in being backed by continent,
It looked as if a night of dark intent
Was coming, and not only a night, an age
Someone had better be prepared for rage
There would be more than ocean-water broken
Before God's last *Put out the Light* was spoken

LODGED

The rain to the wind said
'You push and I'll pelt'
They so smote the garden bed
That the flowers actually knelt,
And lay lodged—though not dead.
I know how the flowers felt

A MINOR BIRD

I have wished a bird would fly away,
And not sing by my house all day,

Have clapped my hands at him from the door
When it seemed as if I could bear no more

The fault must partly have been in me
The bird was not to blame for his key

And of course there must be something wrong
In wanting to silence any song

BEREFT

Where had I heard this wind before
Change like this to a deeper roar?
What would it take my standing there for,
Holding open a restive door,
Looking down hill to a frothy shore?
Summer was past and day was past
Sombre clouds in the west were massed
Out in the porch's sagging floor,
Leaves got up in a coil and hissed,
Blindly struck at my knee and missed
Something sinister in the tone
Told me my secret must be known
Word I was in the house alone
Somehow must have gotten abroad,
Word I was in my life alone,
Word I had no one left but God

TREE AT MY WINDOW

Tree at my window, window tree,
My sash is lowered when night comes on,
But let there never be curtain drawn
Between you and me

Vague dream-head lifted out of the ground,
And thing next most diffuse to cloud,
Not all your light tongues talking aloud
Could be profound

But tree, I have seen you taken and tossed,
And if you have seen me when I slept,
You have seen me when I was taken and swept
And all but lost

That day she put our heads together,
Fate had her imagination about her,
Your head so much concerned with outer,
Mine with inner, weather

THE PEACEFUL SHEPHERD

If heaven were to do again,
And on the pasture bars,
I leaned to line the figures in
Between the dotted stars,

I should be tempted to forget,
I fear, the Crown of Rule,
The Scales of Trade, the Cross of Faith,
As hardly worth renewal

For these have governed in our lives,
And see how men have warred
The Cross, the Crown, the Scales may all
As well have been the Sword

A WINTER EDEN

A winter garden in an alder swamp,
Where conies now come out to sun and romp,
As near a paradise as it can be
And not melt snow or start a dormant tree

It lifts existence on a plane of snow
One level higher than the earth below,
One level nearer heaven overhead,
And last year's berries shining scarlet red

It lifts a gaunt luxuriating beast
Where he can stretch and hold his highest feast
On some wild apple tree's young tender bark,
What well may prove the year's high girdle mark

So near to paradise all pairing ends
Here loveless birds now flock as winter friends,
Content with bud-inspecting They presume
To say which buds are leaf and which are bloom

A feather-hammer gives a double knock
This Eden day is done at two o'clock
An hour of winter day might seem too short
To make it worth life's while to wake and sport

THE FLOOD

Blood has been harder to dam back than water
Just when we think we have it impounded safe
Behind new barrier walls (and let it chafe!),
It breaks away in some new kind of slaughter
We choose to say it is let loose by the devil,
But power of blood itself releases blood
It goes by might of being such a flood
Held high at so unnatural a level
It will have outlet, brave and not so brave
Weapons of war and implements of peace
Are but the points at which it finds release
And now it is once more the tidal wave
That when it has swept by leaves summits stained.
Oh, blood will out It cannot be contained

ACQUAINTED WITH THE NIGHT

I have been one acquainted with the night
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-bye;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right
I have been one acquainted with the night

The Voice said, 'Hurl her down!'

The Voices, 'How far down?'

'Seven levels of the world '

'How much time have we?'

'Take twenty years
She *would* refuse love safe with wealth and honor!
The lovely shall be choosers, shall they?
Then let them choose!'

'Then we shall let her choose?'

'Yes, let her choose
Take up the task beyond her choosing '

Invisible hands crowded on her shoulder
In readiness to weigh upon her
But she stood straight still,
In broad round ear-rings, gold and jet with pearls
And broad round suchlike brooch,
Her cheeks high colored,
Proud and the pride of friends.

The Voice asked, 'You can let her choose?'

'Yes, we can let her and still triumph '

'Do it by joys, and leave her always blameless
Be her first joy her wedding,
That though a wedding,
Is yet—well something they know, he and she
And after that her next joy
That though she grieves, her grief is secret
Those friends know nothing of her grief to make it shameful
Her third joy that though now they cannot help but know,
They move in pleasure too far off
To think much or much care
Give her a child at either knee for fourth joy
To tell once and once only, for them never to forget,
How once she walked in brightness,
And make them see it in the winter firelight
But give her friends for then she dare not tell
For their foregone incredulousness
And be her next joy this
Her never having deigned to tell them
Make her among the humblest even
Seem to them less than they are
Hopeless of being known for what she has been,
Failing of being loved for what she is,
Give her the comfort for her sixth of knowing
She fails from strangeness to a way of life
She came to from too high too late to learn
Then send some *one* with eyes to see

And wonder at her where she is,
And words to wonder in her hearing how she came
there,
But without time to linger for her story
Be her last joy her heart's going out to this one
So that she almost speaks
You know them—seven in all '

'Trust us,' the Voices said

'Fred, where is north?'

'North? North is there, my love
The brook runs west'

'West-running Brook then call it
(West-running Brook men call it to this day)
'What does it think it's doing running west
When all the other country brooks flow east
To reach the ocean? It must be the brook
Can trust itself to go by contraries
The way I can with you—and you with me—
Because we're—we're—I don't know what we are
What are we?'

'Young or new?'

'We must be something
We've said we two Let's change that to we three
As you and I are married to each other,
We'll both be married to the brook We'll build
Our bridge across it, and the bridge shall be
Our arm thrown over it asleep beside it
Look, look, it's waving to us with a wave
To let us know it hears me'

'Why, my dear,
That wave's been standing off this jut of shore—'
(The black stream, catching on a sunken rock,
Flung backward on itself in one white wave,
And the white water rode the black forever,
Not gaining but not losing, like a bird
White feathers from the struggle of whose breast
Flecked the dark stream and flecked the darker pool
Below the point, and were at last driven wrinkled
In a white scarf against the far shore alders)
'That wave's been standing off this jut of shore
Ever since rivers, I was going to say,
Were made in heaven It wasn't waved to us '

'It wasn't, yet it was If not to you
It was to me—in an annunciation '

'Oh, if you take it off to lady-land,
As't were the country of the Amazons
We men must see you to the confines of
And leave you there, ourselves forbid to enter,—
It is your brook! I have no more to say '

'Yes, you have, too Go on You thought of something '

'Speaking of contraries, see how the brook
In that white wave runs counter to itself.
It is from that in water we were from

Long, long before we were from any creature
Here we, in our impatience of the steps,
Get back to the beginning of beginnings,
The stream of everything that runs away
Some say existence like a Pirouot
And Pirouette, forever in one place,
Stands still and dances, but it runs away,
It seriously, sadly, runs away
To fill the abyss' void with emptiness
It flows beside us in this water brook,
But it flows over us It flows between us
To separate us for a panic moment
It flows between us, over us, and *with* us
And it is time, strength, tone, light, life and love—
And even substance lapsing unsubstantial,
The universal cataract of death
That spends to nothingness—and unresisted,
Save by some strange resistance in itself,
Not just a swerving, but a throwing back,
As if regret were in it and were sacred
It has this throwing backward on itself
So that the fall of most of it is always
Raising a little, sending up a little
Our life runs down in sending up the clock
The brook runs down in sending up our life
The sun runs down in sending up the brook
And there is something sending up the sun
It is this backward motion toward the source,
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,
The tribute of the current to the source

It is from this in nature we are from
It is most us '

'Today will be the day
You said so '

'No, today will be the day
You said the brook was called West-running Brook '

'Today will be the day of what we both said '

SAND DUNES

Sea waves are green and wet,
But up from where they die,
Rise others vaster yet,
And those are brown and dry

They are the sea made land
To come at the fisher town,
And bury in solid sand
The men she could not drown

She may know cove and cape,
But she does not know mankind
If by any change of shape,
She hopes to cut off mind

Men left her a ship to sink
They can leave her a hut as well,
And be but more free to think
For the one more cast off shell

CANIS MAJOR

The great Overdog,
That heavenly beast
With a star in one eye,
Gives a leap in the east

He dances upright
All the way to the west
And never once drops
On his forefeet to rest

I'm a poor underdog,
But tonight I will bark
With the great Overdog
That romps through the dark

A SOLDIER

He is that fallen lance that lies as hurled,
That lies unlifted now, come dew, come rust,
But still lies pointed as it plowed the dust
If we who sight along it round the world,
See nothing worthy to have been its mark,
It is because like men we look too near,
Forgetting that as fitted to the sphere,
Our missiles always make too short an arc
They fall, they rip the grass, they intersect
The curve of earth, and striking, break their own,
They make us cringe for metal-point on stone
But this we know, the obstacle that checked
And tripped the body, shot the spirit on
Further than target ever showed or shone

IMMIGRANTS

No ship of all that under sailor or steam
Have gathered people to us more and more
But Pilgrim-manned the Mayflower in a dream
Has been her anxious convey in to shore

HANNIBAL

Was there ever a cause too lost,
Ever a cause that was lost too long,
Or that showed with the lapse of time too vain
For the generous tears of youth and song?

The fisherman's swapping a yarn for a yarn
Under the hand of the village barber,
And here in the angle of house and barn
His deep-sea dory has found a harbor

At anchor she rides the sunny sod
As full to the gunnel of flowers growing
As ever she turned her home with cod
From George's bank when winds were blowing

And I judge from that Elysian freight
That all they ask is rougher weather,
And dory and master will sail by fate
To seek for the Happy Isles together

THE TIMES TABLE

More than half way up the pass
Was a spring with a broken drinking glass,
And whether the farmer drank or not
His mare was sure to observe the spot
By cramping the wheel on a water-bar,
Turning her forehead with a star,
And straining her ribs for a monster sigh,
To which the farmer would make reply,
'A sigh for every so many breath,
And for every so many sigh a death
That's what I always tell my wife
Is the multiplication table of life'
The saying may be ever so true,
But it's just the kind of a thing that you,
Nor I, nor nobody else may say,
Unless our purpose is doing harm,
And then I know of no better way
To close a road, abandon a farm,
Reduce the births of the human race,
And bring back nature in people's place

THE INVESTMENT

Over back where they speak of life as staying
('You couldn't call it living, for it ain't'),
There was an old, old house renewed with paint,
And in it a piano loudly playing

Out in the ploughed ground in the cold a digger,
Among unearthed potatoes standing still,
Was counting winter dinners, one a hill,
With half an ear to the piano's vigor

All that piano and new paint back there,
Was it some money suddenly come into?
Or some extravagance young love had been to?
Or old love on an impulse not to care—

Not to sink under being man and wife,
But get some color and music out of life?

THE LAST MOWING

There's a place called Far-away Meadow
We never shall mow in again,
Or such is the talk at the farmhouse
The meadow is finished with men
Then now is the chance for the flowers
That can't stand mowers and plowers
It must be now, though, in season
Before the not mowing brings trees on,
Before trees, seeing the opening,
March into a shadowy claim
The trees are all I'm afraid of,
That flowers can't bloom in the shade of,
It's no more men I'm afraid of,
The meadow is done with the tame
The place for the moment is ours
For you, oh tumultuous flowers,
To go to waste and go wild in,
All shapes and colors of flowers,
I needn't call you by name

THE BIRTHPLACE

Here further up the mountain slope
Than there was ever any hope,
My father built, enclosed a spring,
Strung chains of wall round everything,
Subdued the growth of earth to grass,
And brought our various lives to pass
A dozen girls and boys we were
The mountain seemed to like the stir,
And made of us a little while—
With always something in her smile
Today she wouldn't know our name
(No girl's, of course, has stayed the same)
The mountain pushed us off her knees
And now her lap is full of trees

DUST IN THE EYES

If, as they say, some dust thrown in my eyes
Will keep my talk from getting overwise,
I'm not the one for putting off the proof
Let it be overwhelming, off a roof
And round a corner, blizzard snow for dust
And blind me to a standstill if it must

SITTING BY A BUSH IN BROAD SUNLIGHT

When I spread out my hand here today,
I catch no more than a ray
To feel of between thumb and fingers,
No lasting effect of it lingers

There was one time and only the one
When dust really took in the sun,
And from that one intake of fire
All creatures still warmly suspire

And if men have watched a long time
And never seen sun-smitten slime
Again come to life and crawl off,
We must not be too ready to scoff

God once declared he was true
And then took the veil and withdrew,
And remember how final a hush
Then descended of old on the bush

God once spoke to people by name
The sun once imparted its flame
One impulse persists as our breath,
The other persists as our faith

WHAT FIFTY SAID

When I was young my teachers were the old
I gave up fire for form till I was cold
I suffered like a metal being cast
I went to school to age to learn the past

Now I am old my teachers are the young
What can't be moulded must be cracked and sprung.
I strain at lessons fit to start a suture
I go to school to youth to learn the future

RIDERS

The surest thing there is is we are riders,
And though none too successful at it, guiders,
Through everything presented, land and tide
And now the very air, of what we ride

What is this talked-of mystery of birth
But being mounted bareback on the earth?
We can just see the infant up astride,
His small fist buried in the bushy hide

There is our wildest mount—a headless horse.
But though it runs unbridled off its course,
And all our blandishments would seem defied,
We have ideas yet that we haven't tried

ON LOOKING UP BY CHANCE AT THE CONSTELLATIONS

You'll wait a long, long time for anything much
To happen in heaven beyond the floats of cloud
And the Northern Lights that run like tingling nerves
The sun and moon get crossed, but they never touch,
Nor strike out fire from each other, nor crash out loud
The planets seem to interfere in their curves,
But nothing ever happens, no harm is done
We may as well go patiently on with our life,
And look elsewhere than to stars and moon and sun
For the shocks and changes we need to keep us sane
It is true the longest drouth will end in rain,
The longest peace in China will end in strife
Still it wouldn't reward the watcher to stay awake
In hopes of seeing the calm of heaven break
On his particular time and personal sight
That calm seems certainly safe to last tonight.

THE BEAR

The bear puts both arms around the tree above her
And draws it down as if it were a lover
And its choke cherries lips to kiss good-bye,
Then lets it snap back upright in the sky
Her next step rocks a boulder on the wall
(She's making her cross-country in the fall)
Her great weight creaks the barbed-wire in its staples
As she flings over and off down through the maples,
Leaving on one wire tooth a lock of hair
Such is the uncaged progress of the bear
The world has room to make a bear feel free,
The universe seems cramped to you and me
Man acts more like the poor bear in a cage
That all day fights a nervous inward rage,
His mood rejecting all his mind suggests
He paces back and forth and never rests
The toe-nail click and shuffle of his feet,
The telescope at one end of his beat,
And at the other end the microscope,
Two instruments of nearly equal hope,
And in conjunction giving quite a spread
Or if he rests from scientific tread,
'Tis only to sit back and sway his head
Through ninety odd degrees of arc, it seems,
Between two metaphysical extremes
He sits back on his fundamental butt
With lifted snout and eyes (if any) shut,

(He almost looks religious but he's not),
And back and forth he sways from cheek to cheek,
At one extreme agreeing with one Greek,
At the other agreeing with another Greek
Which may be thought, but only so to speak
A baggy figure, equally pathetic
When sedentary and when peripatetic

THE EGG AND THE MACHINE

He gave the solid rail a hateful kick
From far away there came an answering tick
And then another tick He knew the code
His hate had roused an engine up the road
He wished when he had had the track alone
He had attacked it with a club or stone
And bent some rail wide open like a switch
So as to wreck the engine in the ditch
Too late though, now, he had himself to thank.
Its click was rising to a nearer clank
Here it came breasting like a horse in skirts
(He stood well back for fear of scalding squirts)
Then for a moment all there was was size
Confusion and a roar that drowned the cries
He raised against the gods in the machine
Then once again the sandbank lay serene
The traveler's eye picked up a turtle trail,
Between the dotted feet a streak of tail,
And followed it to where he made out vague
But certain signs of buried turtle's egg,
And probing with one finger not too rough,
He found suspicious sand, and sure enough,
The pocket of a little turtle mine
If there was one egg in it there were nine,
Torpedo-like, with shell of gritty leather
All packed in sand to wait the trump together.
'You'd better not disturb me any more,'

He told the distance, 'I am armed for war
The next machine that has the power to pass
Will get this plasm in its goggle glass '

A Further Range

A LONE STRIKER

The swinging mill bell changed its rate
To tolling like the count of fate,
And though at that the tardy ran,
One failed to make the closing gate
There was a law of God or man
That on the one who came too late
The gate for half an hour be locked,
His time be lost, his pittance docked
He stood rebuked and unemployed
The straining mill began to shake
The mill, though many, many eyed,
Had eyes inscrutably opaque,
So that he couldn't look inside
To see if some forlorn machine
Was standing idle for his sake
(He couldn't hope its heart would break)

And yet he thought he saw the scene
The air was full of dust of wool
A thousand yarns were under pull,
But pull so slow, with such a twist,
All day from spool to lesser spool,
It seldom overtaxed their strength,
They safely grew in slender length
And if one broke by any chance,
The spinner saw it at a glance
The spinner still was there to spin

That's where the human still came in
Her deft hand showed with finger rings
Among the harp-like spread of strings
She caught the pieces end to end
And, with a touch that never missed,
Not so much tied as made them blend
Man's ingenuity was good
He saw it plainly where he stood,
Yet found it easy to resist

He knew another place, a wood,
And in it, tall as trees, were cliffs,
And if he stood on one of these,
'Twould be among the tops of trees,
Their upper branches round him wreathing
Their breathing mingled with his breathing.
If—if he stood! Enough of ifs!
He knew a path that wanted walking,
He knew a spring that wanted drinking,
A thought that wanted further thinking,
A love that wanted re-renewing
Nor was this just a way of talking
To save him the expense of doing
With him it boded action, deed

The factory was very fine,
He wished it all the modern speed
Yet, after all, 'twas not divine,
That is to say, 'twas not a church
He never would assume that he'd

Be any institution's need
But he said then and still would say
If there should ever come a day
When industry seemed like to die
Because he left it in the lurch,
Or even merely seemed to pine
For want of his approval, why
Come get him—they knew where to search

TWO TRAMPS IN MUD TIME

Out of the mud two strangers came
And caught me splitting wood in the yard
And one of them put me off my aim
By hailing cheerily 'Hit them hard!'
I knew pretty well why he dropped behind
And let the other go on a way
I knew pretty well what he had in mind
He wanted to take my job for pay

Good blocks of beech it was I split,
As large around as the chopping block,
And every piece I squarely hit
Fell splinterless as a cloven rock
The blows that a life of self-control
Spares to strike for the common good
That day, giving a loose to my soul,
I spent on the unimportant wood

The sun was warm but the wind was chill
You know how it is with an April day
When the sun is out and the wind is still,
You're one month on in the middle of May
But if you so much as dare to speak,
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,
A wind comes off a frozen peak,
And you're two months back in the middle of March.

A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight
And fronts the wind to unruffle a plume
His song so pitched as not to excite
A single flower as yet to bloom

It is snowing a flake and he half knew
Winter was only playing possum
Except in color he isn't blue,
But he wouldn't advise a thing to blossom.

The water for which we may have to look
In summertime with a witching-wand,
In every wheelrut's now a brook,
In every print of a hoof a pond
Be glad of water, but don't forget
The lurking frost in the earth beneath
That will steal forth after the sun is set
And show on the water its crystal teeth

The time when most I loved my task
These two must make me love it more
By coming with what they came to ask
You'd think I never had felt before
The weight of an ax-head poised aloft,
The grip on earth of outspread feet
The life of muscles rocking soft
And smooth and moist in vernal heat

Out of the woods two hulking tramps
(From sleeping God knows where last night,

But not long since in the lumber camps)
They thought all chopping was theirs of right
Men of the woods and lumberjacks,
They judged me by their appropriate tool
Except as a fellow handled an ax,
They had no way of knowing a fool

Nothing on either side was said
They knew they had but to stay their stay
And all their logic would fill my head
As that I had no right to play
With what was another man's work for gain
My right might be love but theirs was need
And where the two exist in twain
Theirs was the better right—agreed

But yield who will to their separation,
My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sakes

THE WHITE-TAILED HORNET

The white-tailed hornet lives in a balloon
That floats against the ceiling of the woodshed
The exit he comes out at like a bullet
Is like the pupil of a pointed gun
And having power to change his aim in flight,
He comes out more unerring than a bullet
Verse could be written on the certainty
With which he penetrates my best defense
Of whirling hands and arms about the head
To stab me in the sneeze-nerve of a nostril
Such is the instinct of it I allow
Yet how about the insect certainty
That in the neighborhood of home and children
Is such an execrable judge of motives
As not to recognize in me the exception
I like to think I am in everything—
One who would never hang above a bookcase
His Japanese crepe-paper globe for trophy?
He stung me first and stung me afterward
He rolled me off the field head over heels,
And would not listen to my explanations

That's when I went as visitor to his house
As visitor at my house he is better
Hawking for flies about the kitchen door,
In at one door perhaps and out another,
Trust him then not to put you in the wrong

He won't misunderstand your freest movements
Let him light on your skin unless you mind
So many prickly grappling feet at once
He's after the domesticated fly
To feed his thumping grubs as big as he is
Here he is at his best, but even here—
I watched him where he swooped, he pounced, he struck,
But what he found he had was just a nailhead
He struck a second time Another nailhead
'Those are just nailheads Those are fastened down'
Then disconcerted and not unannoyed,
He stooped and struck a little huckleberry
The way a player curls around a football
'Wrong shape, wrong color, and wrong scent,' I said
The huckleberry rolled him on his head
At last it was a fly He shot and missed,
And the fly circled round him in derision
But for the fly he might have made me think
He had been at his poetry, comparing
Nailhead with fly and fly with huckleberry
How like a fly, how very like a fly
But the real fly he missed would never do;
The missed fly made me dangerously skeptic

Won't this whole instinct matter bear revision?
Won't almost any theory bear revision?
To err is human, not to, animal
Or so we pay the compliment to instinct,
Only too liberal of our compliment

That really takes away instead of gives
Our worship, humor, conscientiousness
Went long since to the dogs under the table.
And served us right for having instituted
Downward comparisons As long on earth
As our comparisons were stoutly upward
With gods and angels, we were men at least,
But little lower than the gods and angels
But once comparisons were yielded downward,
Once we began to see our images
Reflected in the mud and even dust,
'Twas disillusion upon disillusion
We were lost piecemeal to the animals,
Like people thrown out to delay the wolves
Nothing but fallibility was left us,
And this day's work made even that seem doubtful.

A BLUE RIBBON AT AMESBURY

Such a fine pullet ought to go
All coiffured to a winter show,
And be exhibited, and win
The answer is this one has been—

And come with all her honors home
Her golden leg, her coral comb,
Her fluff of plumage, white as chalk,
Her style, were all the fancy's talk

It seems as if you must have heard
She scored an almost perfect bird
In her we make ourselves acquainted
With one a Sewell might have painted

Here common with the flock again,
At home in her abiding pen,
She lingers feeding at the trough,
The last to let night drive her off

The one who gave her ankle-band,
Her keeper, empty pail in hand,
He lingers too, averse to slight
His chores for all the wintry night

He leans against the dusty wall,
Immured almost beyond recall,

A depth past many swinging doors
And many litter-muffled floors

He meditates the breeder's art
He has a half a mind to start,
With her for Mother Eve, a race
That shall all living things displace

'Tis ritual with her to lay
The full six days, then rest a day,
At which rate barring broodiness
She well may score an egg-success

The gatherer can always tell
Her well-turned egg's brown sturdy shell,
As safe a vehicle of seed
As is vouchsafed to feathered breed.

No human spectre at the feast
Can scant or hurry her the least
She takes her time to take her fill.
She whets a sleepy sated bill

She gropes across the pen alone
To peck herself a precious stone
She waters at the patient fount
And so to roost, the last to mount

The roost is her extent of flight
Yet once she rises to the height,

She shoulders with a wing so strong
She makes the whole flock move along

The night is setting in to blow
It scours the windowpane with snow,
But barely gets from them or her
For comment a complacent chirr

The lowly pen is yet a hold
Against the dark and wind and cold
To give a prospect to a plan
And warrant prudence in a man

A DRUMLIN WOODCHUCK

One thing has a shelving bank,
Another a rotting plank,
To give it cozier skies
And make up for its lack of size

My own strategic retreat
Is where two rocks almost meet,
And still more secure and snug,
A two-door burrow I dug

With those in mind at my back
I can sit forth exposed to attack
As one who shrewdly pretends
That he and the world are friends

All we who prefer to live
Have a little whistle we give,
And flash, at the least alarm
We dive down under the farm

We allow some time for guile
And don't come out for a while
Either to eat or drink
We take occasion to think

And if after the hunt goes past
And the double-barrelled blast

(Like war and pestilence
And the loss of common sense),

If I can with confidence say
That still for another day,
Or even another year,
I will be there for you, my dear,

It will be because, though small
As measured again the All,
I have been so instinctively thorough
About my crevice and burrow

THE GOLD HESPERIDEE

Square Matthew Hale's young grafted appletree
Began to blossom at the age of five,
And after having entertained the bee,
And cast its flowers and all the stems but three,
It set itself to keep those three alive,
And downy wax the three began to thrive

They had just given themselves a little twist
And turned from looking up and being kissed
To looking down and yet not being sad,
When came Square Hale with Let's see what we had,
And two was all he counted (one he missed),
But two for a beginning wasn't bad

His little Matthew, also five years old,
Was led into the presence of the tree
And raised among the leaves and duly told,
We mustn't touch them yet, but see and see!
And what was green would by and by be gold
Their name was called the Gold Hesperidee

As regularly as he went to feed the pig
Or milk the cow, he visited the fruit,
The dew of night and morning on his boot
Dearer to him than any barnyard brute,
Each swung in danger on its slender twig,
A bubble on a pipe-stem growing big

Long since they swung as three instead of two—
One more, he thought, to take him safely through
Three made it certain nothing Fate could do
With codlin moth or rusty parasite
Would keep him now from proving with a bite
That the name Gold Hesperidee was right

And so he brought them to the verge of frost
But one day when the foliage all went swish
With autumn and the fruit was rudely tossed,
He thought no special goodness could be lost
If he fulfilled at last his summer wish,
And saw them picked unbruised and in a dish,

Where they could ripen safely to the eating
But when he came to look, no apples there
Under, or on the tree, or anywhere,
And the light-natured tree seemed not to care!
'Twas Sunday and Square Hale was dressed for meeting,
The final summons into church was beating

Just as he was without an uttered sound
At those who'd done him such a wrong as that,
Square Matthew Hale took off his Sunday hat
And ceremoniously laid it on the ground,
And leaping on it with a solemn bound,
Danced slowly on it till he trod it flat

Then suddenly he saw the thing he did,
And looked around to see if he was seen
This was the sin that Ahaz was forbid
(The meaning of the passage had been hid)
To look upon the tree when it was green
And worship apples What else could it mean?

God saw him dancing in the orchard path,
But mercifully kept the passing crowd
From witnessing the fault of one so proud
And so the story wasn't told in Gath,
In gratitude for which Square Matthew vowed
To walk a graver man restrained in wrath

IN TIME OF CLOUDBURST

Let the downpour roil and toil!
The worst it can do to me
Is carry some garden soil
A little nearer the sea

'Tis the world-old way of the rain
When it comes to a mountain farm
To exact for a present gain
A little of future harm

And the harm is none too sure,
For when all that was rotted rich
Shall be in the end scoured poor,
When my garden has gone down ditch,

Some force has but to apply,
And summits shall be immersed,
The bottom of seas raised dry—
The slope of the earth reversed

Then all I need do is run
To the other end of the slope,
And on tracts laid new to the sun,
Begin all over to hope

Some worn old tool of my own
Will be turned up by the plow,

The wood of it changed to stone,
But as ready to wield as now

May my application so close
To so endless a repetition
Not make me tired and morose
And resentful of man's condition

A ROADSIDE STAND

The little old house was out with a little new shed
In front at the edge of the road where the traffic sped,
A roadside stand that too pathetically plead,
It would not be fair to say for a dole of bread,
But for some of the money, the cash, whose flow supports
The flower of cities from sinking and withering faint
The polished traffic passed with a mind ahead,
Or if ever aside a moment, then out of sorts
At having the landscape marred with the artless paint
Of signs that with N turned wrong and S turned wrong
Offered for sale wild berries in wooden quarts,
Or crook-necked golden squash with silver warts,
Or beauty rest in a beautiful mountain scene
You have the money, but if you want to be mean,
Why keep your money (this crossly), and go along
The hurt to the scenery wouldn't be my complaint
So much as the trusting sorrow of what is unsaid
Here far from the city we make our roadside stand
And ask for some city money to feel in hand
To try if it will not make our being expand,
And give us the life of the moving pictures' promise
That the party in power is said to be keeping from us

It is in the news that all these pitiful kin
Are to be bought out and mercifully gathered in
To live in villages next to the theatre and store

Where they won't have to think for themselves any
more,
While greedy good-doers, beneficent beasts of prey,
Swarm over their lives enforcing benefits
That are calculated to soothe them out of their wits,
And by teaching them how to sleep the sleep all day,
Destroy their sleeping at night the ancient way

Sometimes I feel myself I can hardly bear
The thought of so much childish longing in vain,
The sadness that lurks near the open window there,
That waits all day in almost open prayer
For the squeal of brakes, the sound of a stopping car,
Of all the thousand selfish cars that pass,
Just one to inquire what a farmer's prices are
And one did stop, but only to plow up grass
In using the yard to back and turn around,
And another to ask the way to where it was bound,
And another to ask could they sell it a gallon of gas
They couldn't (this crossly) they had none, didn't
it see?

No, in country money, the country scale of gain,
The requisite lift of spirit has never been found,
Or so the voice of the country seems to complain
I can't help owning the great relief it would be
To put these people at one stroke out of their pain
And then next day as I come back into the sane,
I wonder how I should like you to come to me
And offer to put me gently out of my pain

DEPARTMENTAL

An ant on the table cloth
Ran into a dormant moth
Of many times his size
He showed not the least surprise
His business wasn't with such
He gave it scarcely a touch,
And was off on his duty run
Yet if he encountered one
Of the hive's enquiry squad
Whose work is to find out God
And the nature of time and space,
He would put him onto the case
Ants are a curious race,
One crossing with hurried tread
The body of one of their dead
Isn't given a moment's arrest—
Seems not even impressed
But he no doubt reports to any
With whom he crosses antennae,
And they no doubt report
To the higher up at court
Then word goes forth in Formic
'Death's come to Jerry McCormic,
Our selfless forager Jerry
Will the special Janizary
Whose office it is to bury
The dead of the commissary

Go bring him home to his people
Lay him in state on a sepal
Wrap him for shroud in a petal
Embalm him with ichor of nettle
This is the word of your Queen '
And presently on the scene
Appears a solemn mortician,
And taking formal position
With feelers calmly atwiddle,
Seizes the dead by the middle,
And heaving him high in air,
Carries him out of there
No one stands round to stare
It is nobody else's affair

It couldn't be called ungentle
But how thoroughly departmental

ON THE HEART'S BEGINNING TO CLOUD THE MIND

Something I saw or thought I saw
In the desert at midnight in Utah,
Looking out of my lower berth
At moonlit sky and moonlit earth
The sky had here and there a star,
The earth had a single light afar,
A flickering, human pathetic light,
That was maintained against the night,
It seemed to me, by the people there,
With a God-forsaken brute despair
It would flutter and fall in half an hour
Like the last petal off a flower
But my heart was beginning to cloud my mind
I knew a tale of a better kind
That far light flickers because of trees
The people can burn it as long as they please
And when their interests in it end,
They can leave it to someone else to tend
Come back that way a summer hence,
I should find it no more no less intense
I pass, but scarcely pass no doubt,
When one will say, 'Let us put it out'
The other without demur agrees
They can keep it burning as long as they please,
They can put it out whenever they please
One looks out last from the darkened room

At the shiny desert with spots of gloom
That might be people and are but cedar,
Have no purpose, have no leader,
Have never made the first move to assemble,
And so are nothing to make her tremble
She can think of places that are not thus
Without indulging a 'Not for us!'
Life is not so sinister-grave
Matter of fact has made them brave
He is husband, she is wife
She fears not him, they fear not life
They know where another light has been
And more than one to their akin,
But earlier out for bed tonight,
So lost on me in my surface flight

This I saw when waking late,
Going by at a railroad rate,
Looking through wreaths of engine smoke
Far into the lives of other folk

THE FIGURE IN THE DOORWAY

The grade surmounted, we were riding high
Through level mountains nothing to the eye
But scrub oak, scrub oak and the lack of earth
That kept the oaks from getting any girth
But as through the monotony we ran,
We came to where there was a living man
His great gaunt figure filled his cabin door,
And had he fallen inward on the floor,
He must have measured to the further wall
But we who passed were not to see him fall
The miles and miles he lived from anywhere
Were evidently something he could bear
He stood unshaken, and if grim and gaunt,
It was not necessarily from want
He had the oaks for heating and for light
He had a hen, he had a pig in sight
He had a well, he had the rain to catch
He had a ten by twenty garden patch
Nor did he lack for common entertainment
That I assume was what our passing train meant
He could look at us in our diner eating,
And if so moved uncurl a hand in greeting

AT WOODWARD'S GARDENS

A boy, presuming on his intellect,
Once showed two little monkeys in a cage
A burning-glass they could not understand
And never could be made to understand
Words are no good to say it was a lens
For gathering solar rays would not have helped
But let him show them how the weapon worked
He made the sun a pin-point on the nose
Of first one then the other till it brought
A look of puzzled dimness to their eyes
That blinking could not seem to blink away
They stood arms laced together at the bars,
And exchanged troubled glances over life
One put a thoughtful hand up to his nose
As if reminded—or as if perhaps
Within a million years of an idea
He got his purple little knuckles stung
The already known had once more been confirmed
By psychological experiment,
And that were all the finding to announce
Had the boy not presumed too close and long
There was a sudden flash of arm, a snatch
And the glass was the monkeys' not the boy's
Precipitately they retired back cage
And instituted an investigation
On their part, though without the needed insight
They bit the glass and listened for the flavor

They broke the handle and the binding off it
Then none the wiser, frankly gave it up,
And having hid it in their bedding straw
Against the day of prisoners' ennui,
Came dryly forward to the bars again
To answer for themselves Who said it mattered
What monkeys did or didn't understand?
They might not understand a burning-glass
They might not understand the sun itself
It's knowing what to do with things that counts

A RECORD STRIDE

In a Vermont bedroom closet
With a door of two broad boards
And for back wall a crumbling old chimney
(And that's what their toes are towards),

I have a pair of shoes standing,
Old rivals of sagging leather,
Who once kept surpassing each other,
But now live even together

They listen for me in the bedroom
To ask me a thing or two
About who is too old to go walking,
With too much stress on the who

I wet one last year at Montauk
For a hat I had to save
The other I wet at the Cliff House
In an extra-vagant wave

Two entirely different grandchildren
Got me into my double adventure
But when they grow up and can read this
I hope they won't take it for censure

I touch my tongue to the shoes now
And unless my sense is at fault,

On one I can taste Atlantic,
On the other Pacific, salt

One foot in each great ocean
Is a record stride or stretch
The authentic shoes it was made in
I should sell for what they would fetch

But instead I proudly devote them
To my museum and muse,
So the thick-skins needn't act thin-skinned
About being past-active shoes

And I ask all to try to forgive me
For being as over-elated
As if I had measured the country
And got the United States stated

LOST IN HEAVEN

The clouds, the source of rain, one stormy night
Offered an opening to the source of dew,
Which I accepted with impatient sight,
Looking for my old skymarks in the blue

But stars were scarce in that part of the sky,
And no two were of the same constellation—
No one was bright enough to identify,
So 'twas with not ungrateful consternation,

Seeing myself well lost once more, I sighed,
'Where, where in Heaven am I? But don't tell me!'
I warned the clouds, 'by opening on me wide
Let's let my heavenly lostness overwhelm me'

DESERT PLACES

Snow falling and night falling fast oh fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last

The woods around it have it—it is theirs
All animals are smothered in their lairs
I am too absent-spirited to count,
The loneliness includes me unawares

And lonely as it is that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less—
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars—on stars where no human race is
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places

LEAVES COMPARED WITH FLOWERS

A tree's leaves may be ever so good,
So may its bark, so may its wood,
But unless you put the right thing to its root
It never will show much flower or fruit.

But I may be one who does not care
Ever to have tree bloom or bear
Leaves for smooth and bark for rough,
Leaves and bark may be tree enough

Some giant trees have bloom so small
They might as well have none at all
Late in life I have come on fern
Now lichens are due to have their turn

I bade men tell me which in brief,
Which is fairer, flower or leaf
They did not have the wit to say,
Leaves by night and flowers by day

Leaves and bark, leaves and bark,
To lean against and hear in the dark
Petals I may have once pursued.
Leaves are all my darker mood

A LEAF TREADER

I have been treading on leaves all day until I am
autumn-tired
God knows all the color and form of leaves I have
trodden on and mired
Perhaps I have put forth too much strength and
been too fierce from fear
I have safely trodden underfoot the leaves of another
year

All summer long they were over head, more lifted
up than I
To come to their final place in earth they had to
pass me by
All summer long I thought I heard them threatening
under their breath
And when they came it seemed with a will to carry
me with them to death

They spoke to the fugitive in my heart as if it were
leaf to leaf
They tapped at my eyelids and touched my lips
with an invitation to grief
But it was no reason I had to go because they had
to go
Now up my knee to keep on top of another year of
snow

THEY WERE WELCOME TO THEIR BELIEF

Grief may have thought it was grief
Care may have thought it was care
They were welcome to their belief,
The over important pair

No, it took all the snows that clung
To the low roof over his bed,
Beginning when he was young,
To induce the one snow on his head

But whenever the roof came white
The head in the dark below
Was a shade less the color of night
A shade more the color of snow

Grief may have thought it was grief
Care may have thought it was care
But neither one was the thief
Of his raven color of hair

THE STRONG ARE SAYING NOTHING

The soil now gets a rumpling soft and damp,
And small regard to the future of any weed
The final flat of the hoe's approval stamp
Is reserved for the bed of a few selected seed

There is seldom more than a man to a harrowed piece
Men work alone, their lots plowed far apart,
One stringing a chain of seed in an open crease,
And another stumbling after a halting cart

To the fresh and black of the squares of early mould
The leafless bloom of a plum is fresh and white,
Though there's more than a doubt if the weather is not too cold
For the bees to come and serve its beauty aright

Wind goes from farm to farm in wave on wave,
But carries no cry of what is hoped to be
There may be little or much beyond the grave,
But the strong are saying nothing until they see

THE MASTER SPEED

No speed of wind or water rushing by
But you have speed far greater You can climb
Back up a stream of radiance to the sky,
And back through history up the stream of time
And you were given this swiftness, not for haste,
Nor chiefly that you may go where you will,
But in the rush of everything to waste,
That you may have the power of standing still—
Off any still or moving thing you say
Two such as you with such a master speed
Cannot be parted nor be swept away
From one another once you are agreed
That life is only life forevermore
Together wing to wing and oar to oar

MOON COMPASSES

I stole forth dimly in the dripping pause
Between two downpours to see what there was
And a masked moon had spread down compass rays
To a cone mountain in the midnight haze,
As if the final estimate were hers,
And as it measured in her calipers,
The mountain stood exalted in its place
So love will take between the hands a face

NEITHER OUT FAR NOR IN DEEP

The people along the sand
All turn and look one way
They turn their back on the land
They look at the sea all day

As long as it takes to pass
A ship keeps raising its hull,
The wetter ground like glass
Reflects a standing gull

The land may vary more,
But wherever the truth may be—
The water comes ashore,
And the people look at the sea

They cannot look out far
They cannot look in deep
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep?

VOICE WAYS

Some things are never clear
But the weather is clear tonight,
Thanks to a clearing rain
The mountains are brought up near,
The stars are brought out bright
Your old sweet-cynical strain
Would come in like you here
'So we won't say nothing is clear'

DESIGN

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—
Assorted characters of death and blight
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,
Like the ingredients of a witches' broth—
A snow-drop spider, a flower like froth,
And dead wings carried like a paper kite

What had that flower to do with being white,
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?
What brought the kindred spider to that height,
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
What but design of darkness to appall?—
If design govern in a thing so small

ON A BIRD SINGING IN ITS SLEEP

A bird half wakened in the lunar noon
Sang half way through its little inborn tune
Partly because it sang but once all night
And that from no especial bush's height,
Partly because it sang ventriloquist
And had the inspiration to desist
Almost before the prick of hostile ears,
It ventured less in peril than appears
It could not have come down to us so far
Through the interstices of things ajar
On the long bead chain of repeated birth
To be a bird while we are men on earth
If singing out of sleep and dream that way
Had made it much more easily a prey

UNHARVESTED

A scent of ripeness from over a wall
And come to leave the routine road
And look for what had made me stall,
There sure enough was an appletree
That had eased itself of its summer load,
And of all but its trivial foliage free,
Now breathed as light as a lady's fan
For there there had been an apple fall
As complete as the apple had given man
The ground was one circle of solid red

May something go always unharvested!
May much stay out of our stated plan,
Apples or something forgotten and left,
So smelling their sweetness would be no theft.

THERE ARE ROUGHLY ZONES

We sit indoors and talk of the cold outside
And every gust that gathers strength and heaves
Is a threat to the house But the house has long been tried
We think of the tree If it never again has leaves,
We'll know, we say, that this was the night it died
It is very far north, we admit, to have brought the peach
What comes over a man, is it soul or mind—
That to no limits and bounds he can stay confined?
You would say his ambition was to extend the reach
Clear to the Arctic of every living kind
Why is his nature forever so hard to teach
That though there is no fixed line between wrong and right,
There are roughly zones whose laws must be obeyed
There is nothing much we can do for the tree tonight,
But we can't help feeling more than a little betrayed
That the northwest wind should rise to such a height
Just when the cold went down so many below
The tree has no leaves and may never have them again
We must wait till some months hence in the spring to know
But if it is destined never again to grow,
It can blame this limitless trait in the hearts of men

A TRIAL RUN

I said to myself almost in prayer,
It will start hair raising currents of air
When you give it the livid metal-sap
It will make a homicidal roar
It will shake its cast stone reef of floor.
It will gather speed till your nerves prepare
To hear it wreck in a thunder-clap
But stand your ground
As they say in war,
It is cotter-pinned, it is bedded true
Everything its parts can do
Has been thought out and accounted for
Your least touch sets it going round,
And when to stop it rests with you

NOT QUITE SOCIAL

Some of you will be glad I did what I did,
And the rest won't want to punish me too severely
For finding a thing to do that though not forbid
Yet wasn't enjoined and wasn't expected clearly

To punish me over cruelly wouldn't be right
For merely giving you once more gentle proof
That the city's hold on a man is no more tight
Than when its walls rose higher than any roof

You may taunt me with not being able to flee the
earth
You have me there, but loosely as I would be held
The way of understanding is partly mirth
I would not be taken as ever having rebelled

And anyone is free to condemn me to death—
If he leaves it to nature to carry out the sentence
I shall will to the common stock of air my breath
And pay a death-tax of fairly polite repentance

PROVIDE PROVIDE

The witch that came (the withered hag)
To wash the steps with pail and rag,
Was once the beauty Abishag,

The picture pride of Hollywood
Too many fall from great and good
For you to doubt the likelihood

Die early and avoid the fate
Or if predestined to die late,
Make up your mind to die in state

Make the whole stock exchange your own!
If need be occupy a throne,
Where nobody can call *you* crone

Some have relied on what they knew,
Others on being simply true
What worked for them might work for you

No memory of having starred
Atones for later disregard,
Or keeps the end from being hard

Better to go down dignified
With boughten friendship at your side
Than none at all Provide, provide!

PRECAUTION

I never dared be radical when young
For fear it would make me conservative when old.

THE SPAN OF LIFE

The old dog barks backward without getting up
I can remember when he was a pup

THE WRIGHTS' BIPLANE

This biplane is the shape of human flight
Its name might better be First Motor Kite
Its makers' name—Time cannot get that wrong,
For it was writ in heaven doubly Wright

ASSERTIVE

Let me be the one
To do what is done

EVIL TENDENCIES CANCEL

Will the blight end the chestnut?
The farmers rather guess not
It keeps smouldering at the roots
And sending up new shoots
Till another parasite
Shall come to end the blight

PERTINAX

Let chaos storm!
Let cloud shapes swarm!
I wait for form

WASPISH

On glossy wires artistically bent,
He draws himself up to his full extent
His natty wings with self-assurance perk.
His stinging quarters menacingly work
Poor egotist, he has no way of knowing
But he's as good as anybody going

ONE GUESS

He has dust in his eyes and a fan for a wing,
A leg akimbo with which he can sing,
And a mouthful of dye stuff instead of a sting.

THE HARDSHIP OF ACCOUNTING

Never ask of money spent
Where the spender thinks it went
Nobody was ever meant
To remember or invent
What he did with every cent

NOT ALL THERE

I turned to speak to God
About the world's despair,
But to make bad matters worse

I found God wasn't there
God turned to speak to me
(Don't anybody laugh)
God found I wasn't there—
At least not over half

IN DIVES' DIVE

It is late at night and still I am losing,
But still I am steady and unaccusing

As long as the Declaration guards
My right to be equal in number of cards,

It is nothing to me who runs the Dive
Let's have a look at another five

You like to hear about gold
A king filled his prison room
As full as the room could hold
To the top of his reach on the wall
With every known shape of the stuff
'Twas to buy himself off his doom
But it wasn't ransom enough
His captors accepted it all,
But didn't let go of the king
They made him send out a call
To his subjects to gather them more
And his subjects wrung all they could wring
Out of temple and palace and store
But when there seemed no more to bring,
His captors convicted the king
Of once having started a war,
And strangled the wretch with a string

But really that gold was not half
That a king might have hoped to compel
Not a half, not a third, not a tithe
The king had scarce ceased to writhe,
When hate gave a terrible laugh,
Like a manhole opened to Hell
If gold pleased the conqueror, well,
That gold should be the one thing
The conqueror henceforth should lack

They gave no more thought to the king
All joined in the game of hide-gold
They swore all the gold should go back
Deep into the earth whence it came

Their minds ran on cranny and crack
All joined in the maddening game
The tale is still boastingly told
Of many a treasure by name
That vanished into the black
And put out its light for the foe

That self-sack and self-overthrow
That was the splendidest sack
Since the forest Germans sacked Rome
And took the gold candlesticks home

One Inca prince on the rack,
And late in his last hour alive,
Told them in what lake to dive
To seek what they seemed so to want
They dived and nothing was found
He told them to dive till they drowned
The whole fierce conquering pack
Hunted and tortured and raged
There were suns of story and vaunt
They searched for into Brazil
Their tongues hanging out unassuaged

But the conquered grew meek and still
They slowly and silently aged
They kept their secrets and died,
Maliciously satisfied
One knew of a burial hole
In the floor of a tribal cave,
Where under deep ash and charcoal
And cracked bones, human and beast,
The midden of feast upon feast,

Was coiled in its last resting grave
The great treasure wanted the most,
The great thousand-linked gold chain,
Each link of a hundred weight,
That once between post and post
(In-leaning under the strain),
And looped ten times back and forth,
Had served as a palace gate
Some said it had gone to the coast,
Some over the mountains east,
Some into the country north,
On the backs of a single-file host,
Commanded by one sun-priest,
And raising a dust with a train
Of flashing links in the sun
No matter what some may say
(The saying is never done)
There bright in the filth it lay
Untarnished by rust and decay.
And be all plunderers curst

'The best way to hate is the worst
'Tis to find what the hated need,
Never mind of what actual worth,
And wipe that out of the earth
Let them die of unsatisfied greed,
Of unsatisfied love of display,
Of unsatisfied love of the high,
Unvulgar, unsoiled, and ideal
Let their trappings be taken away
Let them suffer starvation and die
Of being brought down to the real'

THE BEARER OF EVIL TIDINGS

The bearer of evil tidings,
When he was halfway there,
Remembered that evil tidings
Were a dangerous thing to bear

So when he came to the parting
Where one road led to the throne
And one went off to the mountains
And into the wild unknown,

He took the one to the mountains
He ran through the Vale of Cashmere,
He ran through the rhododendrons
Till he came to the land of Pamir

And there in a precipice valley
A girl of his age he met
Took him home to her bower,
Or he might be running yet

She taught him her tribe's religion
How ages and ages since
A princess en route from China
To marry a Persian prince

Had been found with child, and her army
Had come to a troubled halt

And though a god was the father
And nobody else at fault,

It had seemed discreet to remain there
And neither go on nor back
So they stayed and declared a village
There in the land of the Yak

And the child that came of the princess
Established a royal line,
And his mandates were given heed to
Because he was born divine

And that was why there were people
On one Himalayan shelf,
And the bearer of evil tidings
Decided to stay there himself

At least he had this in common
With the race he chose to adopt
They had both of them had their reasons
For stopping where they had stopped

As for his evil tidings,
Belshazzar's overthrow,
Why hurry to tell Belshazzar
What soon enough he would know?

IRIS BY NIGHT

One misty evening, one another's guide,
We two were groping down a Malvern side
The last wet fields and dripping hedges home
There came a moment of confusing lights,
Such as according to belief in Rome
Were seen of old at Memphis on the heights
Before the fragments of a former sun
Could concentrate anew and rise as one
Light was a paste of pigment in our eyes
And then there was a moon and then a scene
So watery as to seem submarine,
In which we two stood saturated, drowned
The clover-mingled rowan on the ground
Had taken all the water it could as dew,
And still the air was saturated too,
Its airy pressure turned to water weight
Then a small rainbow like a trellis gate,
A very small moon-made prismatic bow,
Stood closely over us through which to go
And then we were vouchsafed the miracle
That never yet to other two befell
And I alone of us have lived to tell
A wonder! Bow and rainbow as it bent,
Instead of moving with us as we went,
(To keep the pots of gold from being found)
It lifted from its dewy pediment
Its two mote-swimming many-colored ends,

And gathered them together in a ring
And we stood in it softly circled round
From all division time or foe can bring
In a relation of elected friends

BUILD SOIL—A POLITICAL PASTORAL

Why Tityrus! But you've forgotten me
I'm Meliboeus the potato man,
The one you had the talk with, you remember,
Here on this very campus years ago
Hard times have struck me and I'm on the move
I've had to give my interval farm up
For interest, and I've bought a mountain farm
For nothing down, all-out-doors of a place,
All woods and pasture only fit for sheep
But sheep is what I'm going into next
I'm done forever with potato crops
At thirty cents a bushel Give me sheep
I know wool's down to seven cents a pound
But I don't calculate to sell my wool
I didn't my potatoes I consumed them
I'll dress up in sheep's clothing and eat sheep
The Muse takes care of you You live by writing
Your poems on a farm and call that farming
Oh I don't blame you I say take life easy
I should myself, only I don't know how
But have some pity on us who have to work
Why don't you use your talents as a writer
To advertise our farms to city buyers,
Or else write something to improve food prices
Get in a poem toward the next election

Oh Meliboeus, I have half a mind
To take a writing hand in politics
Before now poetry has taken notice
Of wars, and what are wars but politics
Transformed from chronic to acute and bloody?
I may be wrong, but Tityrus to me
The times seem revolutionary bad

The question is whether they've reached a depth
Of desperation that would warrant poetry's
Leaving love's alternations, joy and grief,
The weather's alternations, summer and winter,
Our age-long theme, for the uncertainty
Of judging who is a contemporary liar—
Who in particular, when all alike
Get called as much in clashes of ambition
Life may be tragically bad, and I
Make bold to sing it so, but do I dare
Name names and tell you who by name is wicked?
Whittier's luck with Skipper Ireson awes me
Many men's luck with Greatest Washington
(Who sat for Stuart's portrait, but who sat
Equally for the nation's Constitution)
I prefer to sing safely in the realm
Of types, composite and imagined people
To affirm there is such a thing as evil
Personified, but ask to be excused
From saying on a jury 'Here's the guilty

I doubt if you're convinced the times are bad
I keep my eye on Congress, Meliboeus
They're in the best position of us all
To know if anything is very wrong
I mean they could be trusted to give the alarm
If earth were thought about to change its axis,
Or a star coming to dilate the sun
As long as lightly all their live-long sessions,
Like a yard full of school boys out at recess
Before their plays and games were organized,
They yelling mix tag, hide-and-seek, hop-scotch,
And leap frog in each other's way,—all's well
Let newspapers profess to fear the worst!
Nothing's portentous, I am reassured

Is socialism needed, do you think?

We have it now For socialism is
An element in any government
There's no such thing as socialism pure—
Except as an abstraction of the mind
There's only democratic socialism
Monarchic socialism—oligarchic,
The last being what they seem to have in Russia
You often get it most in monarchy,
Least in democracy In practice, pure,
I don't know what it would be No one knows
I have no doubt like all the loves when
Philosophized together into one—
One sickness of the body and the soul

Thank God our practice holds the loves apart
Beyond embarrassing self-consciousness
Where natural friends are met, where dogs are kept,
Where women pray with priests There is no love
There's only love of men and women, love
Of children, love of friends, of men, of God,
Divine love, human love, parental love,
Roughly discriminated for the rough

Poetry, itself once more, is back in love

Pardon the analogy, my Meliboeus,
For sweeping me away Let's see, where was I?
But don't you think more should be socialized
Than is?
What should you mean by socialized?

Made good for everyone—things like inventions—
Made so we all should get the good of them—
All, not just great exploiting businesses

We sometimes only get the bad of them
In your sense of the word ambition has
Been socialized—the first propensity
To be attempted Greed may well come next.
But the worst one of all to leave uncurbed,
Unsocialized, is ingenuity
Which for no sordid self-aggrandizement,
For nothing but its own blind satisfaction

(In this it is as much like hate as love)
Works in the dark as much against as for us
Even while we talk some chemist at Columbia
Is stealthily contriving wool from jute
That when let loose upon the grazing world
Will put ten thousand farmers out of sheep
Everyone asks for freedom for himself,
The man free love, the business man free trade,
The writer and talker free speech and free press
Political ambition has been taught,
By being punished back, it is not free
It must at some point gracefully refrain
Greed has been taught a little abnegation
And shall be more before we're done with it
It is just fool enough to think itself
Self-taught But our brute snarling and lashing
taught it
None shall be as ambitious as he can
None should be as ingenious as he could,
Not if I had my say Bounds should be set
To ingenuity for being so cruel
In bringing change unheralded on the unready.

I elect you to put the curb on it.

Were I dictator, I'll tell you what I'd do

What should you do?
I'd let things take their course
And then I'd claim the credit for the outcome

You'd make a sort of safety-first dictator

Don't let the things I say against myself
Betray you into taking sides against me,
Or it might get you into trouble with me
I'm not afraid to prophesy the future,
And be judged by the outcome, Meliboeus
Listen and I will take my dearest risk
We're always too much out or too much in.
At present from a cosmical dilation
We're so much out that the odds are against
Our ever getting inside in again
But inside in is where we've got to get
My friends all know I'm interpersonal
But long before I'm interpersonal
Away 'way down inside I'm personal
Just so before we're international
We're national and act as nationals
The colors are kept unmixed on the palette,
Or better on dish plates all around the room,

So the effect when they are mixed on canvas
May seem almost exclusively designed
Some minds are so confounded intermental
They remind me of pictures on a palette
'Look at what happened Surely some God pinxit.
Come look at my significant mud pie '
It's hard to tell which is the worse abhorrence
Whether it's persons pied or nations pied
Don't let me seem to say the exchange, the encounter,

May not be the important thing at last
It well may be We meet—I don't say when
But must bring to the meeting the maturest,
The longest-saved-up, raciest, localest
We have strength of reserve in us to bring

Tityrus, sometimes I'm perplexed myself
To find the good of commerce Why should I
Have to sell you my apples and buy yours?
It can't be just to give the robber a chance
To catch them and take toll of them in transit
Too mean a thought to get much comfort out of.
I figure that like any bandying
Of words or toys, it ministers to health
It very likely quickens and refines us

To market 'tis our destiny to go
But much as in the end we bring for sale there
There is still more we never bring or should bring;
More that should be kept back—the soil for
instance
In my opinion,—though we both know poets
Who fall all over each other to bring soil
And even subsoil and hardpan to market
To sell the hay off, let alone the soil,
Is an unpardonable sin in farming
The moral is, make a late start to market.
Let me preach to you, will you Meliboeus?
Preach on I thought you were already preaching
But preach and see if I can tell the difference

Needless to say to you, my argument
Is not to lure the city to the country
Let those possess the land and only those,
Who love it with a love so strong and stupid
That they may be abused and taken advantage of
And made fun of by business, law and art,
They still hang on That so much of the earth's
Unoccupied need not make us uneasy
We don't pretend to complete occupancy
The world's one globe, human society
Another softer globe that slightly flattened
Rests on the world, and clinging slowly rolls
We have our own round shape to keep unbroken
The world's size has no more to do with us
Than has the universe's We are balls,
We are round from the same source of roundness
We are both round because the mind is round,
Because all reasoning is in a circle
At least that's why the universe is round

If what you're preaching is a line of conduct,
Just what am I supposed to do about it?
Reason in circles?

No, refuse to be
Seduced back to the land by any claim
The land may seem to have on man to use it
Let none assume to till the land but farmers
I only speak to you as one of them
You shall go to your run-out mountain farm,

Poor cast-away of commerce, and so live
That none shall ever see you come to market.
Not for a long long time Plant, breed, produce,
But what you raise or grow, why feed it out,
Eat it or plow it under where it stands
To build the soil For what is more accursed
Than an impoverished soil pale and metallic?
What cries more to our kind for sympathy?
I'll make a compact with you, Meliboeus,
To match you deed for deed and plan for plan
Friends crowd around me with their five year plans
That Soviet Russia has made fashionable
You come to me and I'll unfold to you
A five year plan I call so, not because
It takes ten years or so to carry out,
Rather because it took five years at least
To think it out Come close, let us conspire—
In self-restraint, if in restraint of trade
You will go to your run-out mountain farm
And do what I command you, I take care
To command only what you meant to do
Anyway That is my style of dictator
Build soil Turn the farm in upon itself
Until it can contain itself no more,
But sweating-full, drips wine and oil a little.
I will go to my run-out social mind
And be as unsocial with it as I can
The thought I have, and my first impulse is
To take to market—I will turn it under
The thought from that thought—I will turn it under

And so on to the limit of my nature
We are too much out, and if we won't draw in
We shall be driven in I was brought up
A state-rights free-trade Democrat What's that?
An inconsistency The state shall be
Laws to itself, it seems, and yet have no
Control of what it sells or what it buys
Suppose someone comes near me who in rate
Of speech and thinking is so much my better
I am imposed on, silenced and discouraged
Do I submit to being supplied by him
As the more economical producer,
More wonderful, more beautiful producer?
No I unostentatiously move off
Far enough for my thought-flow to resume
Thought product and food product are to me
Nothing compared to the producing of them
I sent you once a song with the refrain

Let me be the one
To do what is done—

My share at least lest I be empty-idle
Keep off each other and keep each other off
You see the beauty of my proposal is
It needn't wait on general revolution
I bid you to a one-man revolution —
The only revolution that is coming
We're too unseparate out among each other—
With goods to sell and notions to impart

A youngster comes to me with half a quatrain
To ask me if I think it worth the pains
Of working out the rest, the other half
I am brought guaranteed young prattle poems
Made publicly in school, above suspicion
Of plagiarism and help of cheating parents
We congregate embracing from distrust
As much as love, and too close in to strike
And be so very striking Steal away
The song says Steal away and stay away
Don't join too many gangs Join few if any
Join the United States and join the family.
But not much in between unless a college
Is it a bargain, Shepherd Meliboeus?

Probably but you're far too fast and strong
For my mind to keep working in your presence
I can tell better after I get home,
Better a month from now when cutting posts
Or mending fence it all comes back to me
What I was thinking when you interrupted
My life-train logic I agree with you
We're too unseparate And going home
From company means coming to our senses

A MISSIVE MISSILE

Some one in ancient Mas d'Azil
Once took a little pebble wheel
And dotted it with red for me,
And sent it to me years and years—
A million years to be precise—
Across the barrier of ice
Two round dots and a ripple streak,
So vivid as to seem to speak
But what imperfectly appears
Is whether the two dots were tears,
Two tear drops, one for either eye,
And the wave line a shaken sigh
But no, the color used is red
Not tears but drops of blood instead
The line must be a jagged blade
The sender must have had to die,
And wanted some one now to know
His death was sacrificial-votive
So almost clear and yet obscure
If only anyone were sure
A motive then was still a motive
O you who bring this to my hand,
You are no common messenger
(Your badge of office is a spade)
It grieves me to have had you stand
So long for nothing No reply—
There is no answer, I'm afraid,

Across the icy barrier
For my obscure petitioner
Suppose his ghost is standing by
Importunate to give the hint
And be successfully conveyed
How anyone can fail to see
Where perfectly in form and tint
The metaphor, the symbol lies!
Why will I not analogize?
(I do too much in some men's eyes)
Oh slow uncomprehending me,
Enough to make a spirit moan
Or rustle in a bush or tree
I have the ochre-written flint,
The two dots and the ripple line
The meaning of it is unknown,
Or else I fear entirely mine,
All modern, nothing ancient in't,
Unsatisfying to us each
Far as we aim our signs to reach,
Far as we often make them reach,
Across the soul-from-soul abyss,
There is an aeon-limit set
Beyond which they are doomed to miss
Two souls may be too widely met
That sad-with-distance river beach
With mortal longing may beseech,
It cannot speak as far as this

A Witness Tree

BEECH

Where my imaginary line
Bends square in woods, an iron spine
And pile of real rocks have been founded
And off this corner in the wild,
Where these are driven in and piled,
One tree, by being deeply wounded,
Has been impressed as Witness Tree
And made commit to memory
My proof of being not unbounded
Thus truth's established and borne out,
Though circumstanced with dark and doubt—
Though by a world of doubt surrounded

THE MOODIE FORESTER

SYCAMORE

Zaccheus he
Did climb the tree
Our Lord to see

THE NEW ENGLAND PRIMER

THE SILKEN TENT

She is as in a field a silken tent
At midday when a sunny summer breeze
Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent,
So that in guys it gently sways at ease,
And its supporting central cedar pole,
That is its pinnacle to heavenward
And signifies the sureness of the soul,
Seems to owe naught to any single cord,
But strictly held by none, is loosely bound
By countless silken ties of love and thought
To everything on earth the compass round,
And only by one's going slightly taut
In the capriciousness of summer air
Is of the slightest bondage made aware

ALL REVELATION

A head thrusts in as for the view,
But where it is it thrusts in from
Or what it is it thrusts into
By that Cyb'laean avenue,
And what can of its coming come,

And whither it will be withdrawn,
And what take hence or leave behind,
These things the mind has pondered on
A moment and still asking gone
Strange apparition of the mind!

But the impervious geode
Was entered, and its inner crust
Of crystals with a ray cathode
At every point and facet glowed
In answer to the mental thrust

Eyes seeking the response of eyes
Bring out the stars, bring out the flowers,
Thus concentrating earth and skies
So none need be afraid of size
All revelation has been ours

HAPPINESS MAKES UP IN HEIGHT FOR WHAT IT LACKS IN LENGTH

Oh, stormy stormy world,
The days you were not swirled
Around with mist and cloud,
Or wrapped as in a shroud,
And the sun's brilliant ball
Was not in part or all
Obscured from mortal view.
Were days so very few
I can but wonder whence
I get the lasting sense
Of so much warmth and light
If my mistrust is right
It may be altogether
From one day's perfect weather,
When starting clear at dawn,
The day swept clearly on
To finish clear at eve
I verily believe
My fair impression may
Be all from that one day
No shadow crossed but ours
As through its blazing flowers
We went from house to wood
For change of solitude.

COME IN

As I came to the edge of the woods,
Thrush music—hark!
Now if it was dusk outside,
Inside it was dark

Too dark in the woods for a bird
By sleight of wing
To better its perch for the night,
Though it still could sing

The last of the light of the sun
That had died in the west
Still lived for one song more
In a thrush's breast

Far in the pillared dark
Thrush music went—
Almost like a call to come in
To the dark and lament

But no, I was out for stars
I would not come in
I meant not even if asked,
And I hadn't been

I COULD GIVE ALL TO TIME

To Time it never seems that he is brave
To set himself against the peaks of snow
To lay them level with the running wave,
Nor is he overjoyed when they lie low,
But only grave, contemplative and grave

What now is inland shall be ocean isle,
Then eddies playing round a sunken reef
Like the curl at the corner of a smile,
And I could share Time's lack of joy or grief
At such a planetary change of style

I could give all to Time except—except
What I myself have held But why declare
The things forbidden that while the Customs slept
I have crossed to Safety with? For I am There,
And what I would not part with I have kept

CARPE DIEM

Age saw two quiet children
Go loving by at twilight,
He knew not whether homeward
Or outward from the village,
Or (chimes were ringing) churchward
He waited (they were strangers)
Till they were out of hearing
To bid them both be happy
"Be happy, happy, happy,
And seize the day of pleasure"
The age-long theme is Age's
'Twas Age imposed on poems
Their gather-roses burden
To warn against the danger
That overtaken lovers
From being overflooded
With happiness should have it
And yet not know they have it
But bid life seize the present?
It lives less in the present
Than in the future always,
And less in both together
Than in the past The present
Is too much for the senses,
Too crowding, too confusing—
Too present to imagine

THE WIND AND THE RAIN

I

That far-off day the leaves in flight
Were letting in the colder light
A season-ending wind there blew
That as it did the forest strew
I leaned on with a singing trust
And let it drive me deathward too
With breaking step I stabbed the dust,
Yet did not much to shorten stride
I sang of death—but had I known
The many deaths one must have died
Before he came to meet his own!
Oh, should a child be left unwarned
That any song in which he mourned
Would be as if he prophesied?
It were unworthy of the tongue
To let the half of life alone
And play the good without the ill.
And yet 'twould seem that what is sung
In happy sadness by the young
Fate has no choice but to fulfill

II

Flowers in the desert heat
Contrive to bloom
On melted mountain water led by flume
To wet their feet

But something in it still is incomplete
Before I thought the wilted to exalt
With water I would see them water-bowed
I would pick up all ocean less its salt,
And though it were as much as cloud could bear
Would load it on to cloud,
And rolling it inland on roller air,
Would empty it unsparing on the flower
That past its prime lost petals in the flood,
(Who cares but for the future of the bud?)
And all the more the mightier the shower
Would run in under it to get my share

'Tis not enough on roots and in the mouth,
But give me water heavy on the head
In all the passion of a broken drouth

And there is always more than should be said

As strong is rain without as wine within,
As magical as sunlight on the skin

I have been one no dwelling could contain
When there was rain,

But I must forth at dusk, my time of day,
To see to the unburdening of skies
Rain was the tears adopted by my eyes
That have none left to stay

THE MOST OF IT

He thought he kept the universe alone,
For all the voice in answer he could wake
Was but the mocking echo of his own
From some tree-hidden cliff across the lake
Some morning from the boulder-broken beach
He would cry out on life, that what it wants
Is not its own love back in copy speech,
But counter-love, original response
And nothing ever came of what he cried
Unless it was the embodiment that crashed
In the cliff's talus on the other side,
And then in the far distant water splashed,
But after a time allowed for it to swim,
Instead of proving human when it neared
And someone else additional to him,
As a great buck it powerfully appeared,
Pushing the crumpled water up ahead,
And landed pouring like a waterfall,
And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread,
And forced the underbrush—and that was all

NEVER AGAIN WOULD BIRDS' SONG BE THE SAME

He would declare and could himself believe
That the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an oversound,
Her tone of meaning but without the words
Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft
Be that as may be, she was in their song
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
Had now persisted in the woods so long
That probably it never would be lost
Never again would birds' song be the same.
And to do that to birds was why she came

WILFUL HOMING

It is getting dark and time he drew to a house,
But the blizzard blinds him to any house ahead
The storm gets down his neck in an icy souse
That sucks his breath like a wicked cat in bed

The snow blows on him and off him, exerting force
Downward to make him sit astride a drift,
Imprint a saddle and calmly consider a course
He peers out shrewdly into the thick and swift

Since he means to come to a door he will come to a door,
Although so compromised of aim and rate
He may fumble wide of the knob a yard or more,
And to those concerned he may seem a little late

A CLOUD SHADOW

A breeze discovered my open book
And began to flutter the leaves to look
For a poem there used to be on Spring
I tried to tell her "There's no such thing!"

For whom would a poem on Spring be by?
The breeze disdained to make reply,
And a cloud-shadow crossed her face
For fear I would make her miss the place

THE QUEST OF THE PURPLE-FRINGED

I felt the chill of the meadow underfoot,
But the sun overhead,
And snatches of verse and song of scenes like this
I sung or said

I skirted the margin alders for miles and miles
In a sweeping line
The day was the day by every flower that blooms,
But I saw no sign

Yet further I went to be before the scythe,
For the grass was high,
Till I saw the path where the slender fox had come
And gone panting by

Then at last and following him I found—
In the very hour
When the color flushed to the petals it must have been—
The far-sought flower

There stood the purple spires with no breath of air
Nor headlong bee
To disturb their perfect poise the livelong day
'Neath the alder tree

I only knelt and putting the boughs aside
Looked, or at most
Counted them all to the buds in the copse's depth
That were pale as a ghost

Then I arose and silently wandered home,
And I for one
Said that the fall might come and whirl of leaves,
For summer was done

THE GIFT OUTRIGHT

The land was ours before we were the land's
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
But we were England's, still colonials,
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
Possessed by what we now no more possessed
Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of living,
And forthwith found salvation in surrender
Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
To the land vaguely realizing westward,
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
Such as she was, such as she would become

TRIPLE BRONZE

The Infinite's being so wide
Is the reason the Powers provide
For inner defense my hide
For next defense outside

I make myself this time
Of wood or granite or lime
A wall too hard for crime
Either to breach or climb

Then a number of us agree
On a national boundary
And that defense makes three
Between too much and me

OUR HOLD ON THE PLANET

We asked for rain It didn't flash and roar
It didn't lose its temper at our demand
And blow a gale It didn't misunderstand
And give us more than our spokesman bargained
for,
And just because we owned to a wish for rain,
Send us a flood and bid us be damned and drown
It gently threw us a glittering shower down
And when we had taken that into the roots of grain,
It threw us another and then another still
Till the spongy soil again was natal wet
We may doubt the just proportion of good to ill
There is much in nature against us But we forget·
Take nature altogether since time began,
Including human nature, in peace and war,
And it must be a little more in favor of man,
Say a fraction of one per cent at the very least,
Or our number living wouldn't be steadily more,
Our hold on the planet wouldn't have so increased

TO A YOUNG WRETCH

(BOETHIAN)

As gay for you to take your father's axe
As take his gun—rod—to go hunting—fishing
You nick my spruce until its fiber cracks,
It gives up standing straight and goes down swishing
You link an arm in its arm and you lean
Across the light snow homeward smelling green

I could have bought you just as good a tree
To frizzle resin in a candle flame,
And what a saving 'twould have meant to me
But tree by charity is not the same
As tree by enterprise and expedition
I must not spoil your Christmas with contrition

It is your Christmases against my woods
But even where thus opposing interests kill,
They are to be thought of as opposing goods
Oftener than as conflicting good and ill,
Which makes the war god seem no special dunce
For always fighting on both sides at once

And though in tinsel chain and popcorn rope,
My tree a captive in your window bay
Has lost its footing on my mountain slope
And lost the stars of heaven, may, oh, may
The symbol star it lifts against your ceiling
Help me accept its fate with Christmas feeling

THE LESSON FOR TODAY

If this uncertain age in which we dwell
Were really as dark as I hear sages tell,
And I convinced that they were really sages,
I should not curse myself with it to hell,
But leaving not the chair I long have sat in,
I should betake me back ten thousand pages
To the world's undebatably dark ages,
And getting up my mediaeval Latin,
Seek converse common cause and brotherhood
(By all that's liberal—I should, I should)
With poets who could calmly take the fate
Of being born at once too early and late,
And for these reasons kept from being great
Yet singing but Dione in the wood
And *ver aspergit terram floribus*
They slowly led old Latin verse to rhyme
And to forget the ancient lengths of time,
And so began the modern world for us

I'd say, O Master of the Palace School,
You were not Charles' nor anybody's fool
Tell me as pedagogue to pedagogue,
You did not know that since King Charles did rule
You had no chance but to be minor, did you?
Your light was spent perhaps as in a fog
That at once kept you burning low and hid you
The age may very well have been to blame
For your not having won to Virgil's fame

But no one ever heard you make the claim
You would not think you knew enough to judge
The age when full upon you That's my point
We have to-day and I could call their name
Who know exactly what is out of joint
To make their verse and their excuses lame
They've tried to grasp with too much social fact
Too large a situation You and I
Would be afraid if we should comprehend
And get outside of too much bad statistics
Our muscles never could again contract
We never could recover human shape,
But must live lives out mentally agape,
Or die of philosophical distension
That's how we feel—and we're no special mystics

We can't appraise the time in which we act
But for the folly of it, let's pretend
We know enough to know it for adverse
One more millennium's about to end
Let's celebrate the event, my distant friend,
In publicly disputing which is worse,
The present age or your age You and I
As schoolmen of repute should qualify
To wage a fine scholastical contention
As to whose age deserves the lower mark,
Or should I say the higher one, for dark
I can just hear the way you make it go
There's always something to be sorry for,
A sordid peace or an outrageous war.

Yes, yes, of course We have the same convention.
The groundwork of all faith is human woe
It was well worth preliminary mention
There's nothing but injustice to be had,
No choice is left a poet, you might add,
But how to take the curse, tragic or comic
It was well worth preliminary mention
But let's get on to where our cases part,
If part they do Let me propose a start
(We're rivals in the badness of our case,
Remember, and must keep a solemn face)
Space ails us moderns we are sick with space
Its contemplation makes us out as small
As a brief epidemic of microbes
That in a good glass may be seen to crawl
The patina of this the least of globes
But have we there the advantage after all?
You were belittled into vilest worms
God hardly tolerated with his feet,
Which comes to the same thing in different terms.
We both are the belittled human race,
One as compared with God and one with space
I had thought ours the more profound disgrace,
But doubtless this was only my conceit
The cloister and the observatory saint
Take comfort in about the same complaint.
So science and religion really meet

I can just hear you call your Palace class
Come learn the Latin Eheu for alas

You may not want to use it and you may
O paladins, the lesson for to-day
Is how to be unhappy yet polite
And at the summons Roland, Olivier,
And every sheepish paladin and peer,
Being already more than proved in fight,
Sits down in school to try if he can write
Like Horace in the true Horatian vein,
Yet like a Christian disciplined to bend
His mind to thinking always of the end
Memento mori and obey the Lord
Art and religion love the somber chord
Earth's a hard place in which to save the soul,
And could it be brought under state control,
So automatically we all were saved,
Its separateness from Heaven could be waived;
It might as well at once be kingdom-come
(Perhaps it will be next millennium)

But these are universals, not confined
To any one time, place, or human kind
We're either nothing or a God's regret
As ever when philosophers are met,
No matter where they stoutly mean to get,
Nor what particulars they reason from,
They are philosophers, and from old habit
They end up in the universal Whole
As unoriginal as any rabbit

One age is like another for the soul
I'm telling you You haven't said a thing,
Unless I put it in your mouth to say
I'm having the whole argument my way—
But in your favor—please to tell your King—
In having granted you all ages shine
With equal darkness, yours as dark as mine
I'm liberal You, you aristocrat
Won't know exactly what I mean by that
I mean so altruistically moral
I never take my own side in a quarrel
I'd lay my hand on his hand on his staff,
Lean back and have my confidential laugh,
And tell him I had read his Epitaph

It sent me to the graves the other day
The only other there was far away
Across the landscape with a watering pot
At his devotions in a special plot
And he was there resuscitating flowers
(Make no mistake about its being bones),
But I was only there to read the stones
To see what on the whole they had to say
About how long a man may think to live,
Which is becoming my concern of late
And very wide the choice they seemed to give,
The ages ranging all the way from hours
To months and years and many many years
One man had lived one hundred years and eight
But though we all may be inclined to wait

And follow some development of state,
Or see what comes of science and invention,
There is a limit to our time extension
We all are doomed to broken-off careers,
And so's the nation, so's the total race
The earth itself is liable to the fate
Of meaninglessly being broken off
(And hence so many literary tears
At which my inclination is to scoff)
I may have wept that any should have died
Or missed their chance, or not have been their best,
Or been their riches, fame, or love denied,
On me as much as any is the jest
I take my incompleteness with the rest
God bless himself can no one else be blessed

I hold your doctrine of Memento Mori
And were an epitaph to be my story
I'd have a short one ready for my own
I would have written of me on my stone
I had a lover's quarrel with the world

TIME OUT

It took that pause to make him realize
The mountain he was climbing had the slant
As of a book held up before his eyes
(And was a text albeit done in plant)
Dwarf cornel, gold-thread, and maianthemum,
He following fingered as he read,
The flowers fading on the seed to come,
But the thing was the slope it gave his head
The same for reading as it was for thought,
So different from the hard and level stare
Of enemies defied and battles fought
It was the obstinately gentle air
That may be clamored at by cause and sec
But it will have its moment to reflect

TO A MOTH SEEN IN WINTER

Here's first a gloveless hand warm from my pocket,
A perch and resting place 'twixt wood and wood,
Bright-black-eyed silvery creature, brushed with brown,
The wings not folded in repose, but spread
(Who would you be, I wonder, by those marks
If I had moths to friend as I have flowers?)
And now pray tell what lured you with false hope
To make the venture of eternity
And seek the love of kind in winter time?
But stay and hear me out I surely think
You make a labor of flight for one so airy,
Spending yourself too much in self-support
Nor will you find love either nor love you
And what I pity in you is something human,
The old incurable untimeliness,
Only begetter of all ills that are
But go You are right My pity cannot help
Go till you wet your pinions and are quenched
You must be made more simply wise than I
To know the hand I stretch impulsively
Across the gulf of well nigh everything
May reach to you, but cannot touch your fate
I cannot touch your life, much less can save,
Who am tasked to save my own a little while

CIRCA 1900

A CONSIDERABLE SPECK

(MICROSCOPIC)

A speck that would have been beneath my sight
On any but a paper sheet so white
Set off across what I had written there
And I had idly poised my pen in air
To stop it with a period of ink
When something strange about it made me think,
This was no dust speck by my breathing blown,
But unmistakably a living mite
With inclinations it could call its own
It paused as with suspicion of my pen,
And then came racing wildly on again
To where my manuscript was not yet dry,
Then paused again and either drank or smelt—
With loathing, for again it turned to fly
Plainly with an intelligence I dealt
It seemed too tiny to have room for feet,
Yet must have had a set of them complete
To express how much it didn't want to die
It ran with terror and with cunning crept
It faltered I could see it hesitate,
Then in the middle of the open sheet
Cower down in desperation to accept
Whatever I accorded it of fate
I have none of the tenderer-than-thou
Collectivistic regimenting love
With which the modern world is being swept

But this poor microscopic item now!
Since it was nothing I knew evil of
I let it lie there till I hope it slept

I have a mind myself and recognize
Mind when I meet with it in any guise
No one can know how glad I am to find
On any sheet the least display of mind

THE LOST FOLLOWER

As I have known them passionate and fine
The gold for which they leave the golden line
Of lyric is a golden light divine,
Never the gold of darkness from a mine

The spirit plays us strange religious pranks
To whatsoever god we owe the thanks
No one has ever failed the poet ranks
To link a chain of money-metal banks

The loss to song, the danger of defection
Is always in the opposite direction
Some turn in sheer, in Shelleyan dejection
To try if one more popular election

Will give us by short cut the final stage
That poetry with all its golden rage
For beauty on the illuminated page
Has failed to bring—I mean the Golden Age

And if this may not be (and nothing's sure),
At least to live ungolden with the poor,
Enduring what the ungolden must endure
This has been poetry's great anti-lure

The muse mourns one who went to his retreat
Long since in some abysmal city street,

The bride who shared the crust he broke to eat
As grave as he about the world's defeat

With such it has proved dangerous as friend
Even in a playful moment to contend
That the millennium to which you bend
In longing is not at a progress-end

By grace of state-manipulated pelf,
Or politics of Ghibelline or Guelph,
But right beside you book-like on a shelf,
Or even better god-like in yourself

He trusts my love too well to deign reply
But there is in the sadness of his eye,
Something about a kingdom in the sky
(As yet unbrought to earth) he means to try

NOVEMBER

We saw leaves go to glory,
Then almost migratory
Go part way down the lane,
And then to end the story
Get beaten down and pasted
In one wild day of rain
We heard " 'Tis over" roaring
A year of leaves was wasted
Oh, we make a boast of storing,
Of saving and of keeping,
But only by ignoring
The waste of moments sleeping,
The waste of pleasure weeping,
By denying and ignoring
The waste of nations warring

1938

THE RABBIT HUNTER

Careless and still
The hunter lurks
With gun depressed,
Facing alone
The alder swamps
Ghastly snow-white
And his hound works
In the offing there
Like one possessed,
And yelps delight
And sings and romps,
Bringing him on
The shadowy hare
For him to rend
And deal a death
That he nor it
(Nor I) have wit
To comprehend

A LOOSE MOUNTAIN

(TELESCOPIC)

Did you stay up last night (the Magi did)
To see the star shower known as Leonid
That once a year by hand or apparatus
Is so mysteriously pelted at us?
It is but fiery puffs of dust and pebbles,
No doubt directed at our heads as rebels
In having taken artificial light
Against the ancient sovereignty of night
A fusillade of blanks and empty flashes,
It never reaches earth except as ashes
Of which you feel no least touch on your face
Nor find in dew the slightest cloudy trace
Nevertheless it constitutes a hint
That the loose mountain lately seen to glint
In sunlight near us in momentous swing
Is something in a Balearic sling
The heartless and enormous Outer Black
Is still withholding in the Zodiac
But from irresolution in his back
About when best to have us in our orbit,
So we won't simply take it and absorb it

IT IS ALMOST THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND

To start the world of old
We had one age of gold
Not labored out of mines,
And some say there are signs
The second such has come,
The true Millennium,
The final golden glow
To end it And if so
(And science ought to know)
We well may raise our heads
From weeding garden beds
And annotating books
To watch this end de luxe

ON OUR SYMPATHY WITH THE UNDER DOG

First under up and then again down under,
We watch a circus of revolving dogs
No senator dares in to kick asunder
Lest both should bite him in the toga-togs

A QUESTION

A voice said, Look me in the stars
And tell me truly, men of earth,
If all the soul-and-body scars
Were not too much to pay for birth.

BOEOTIAN

I love to toy with the Platonic notion
That wisdom need not be of Athens Attic,
But well may be Laconic, even Boeotian
At least I will not have it systematic

THE SECRET SITS

We dance round in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows

A SEMI-REVOLUTION

I advocate a semi-revolution
The trouble with a total revolution
(Ask any reputable Rosicrucian)
Is that it brings the same class up on top
Executives of skillful execution
Will therefore plan to go half-way and stop
Yes, revolutions are the only salves,
But they're one thing that should be done by halves.

ASSURANCE

The danger not an inch outside
Behind the porthole's slab of glass
And double ring of fitted brass
I trust feels properly defied

But Islands of the Blessèd, bless you son
I never came upon a blessèd one

TRESPASS

No, I had set no prohibiting sign,
And yes, my land was hardly fenced
Nevertheless the land was mine
I was being trespassed on and against

Whoever the surly freedom took
Of such an unaccountable stay
Busying by my woods and brook
Gave me strangely restless day

He might be opening leaves of stone,
The picture-book of the trilobite,
For which the region round was known,
And in which there was little property right

'Twas not the value I stood to lose
In specimen crab in specimen rock,
But his ignoring what was whose
That made me look again at the clock

Then came his little acknowledgment
He asked for a drink at the kitchen door,
An errand he may have had to invent,
But it made my property mine once more

A NATURE NOTE

Four or five whippoorwills
Have come down from their native ledge
To the open country edge
To give us a piece of their bills

Two in June were a pair—
You'd say sufficiently loud,
But this was a family crowd,
A full-fledged family affair

All out of time pell-mell!
I wasn't in on the joke
Unless it was coming to folk
To bid us a mock farewell

I took note of when it occurred,
The twenty-third of September,
Their latest that I remember,
September the twenty-third

OF THE STONES OF THE PLACE

I farm a pasture where the boulders lie
As touching as a basket full of eggs,
And though they're nothing anybody begs,
I wonder if it wouldn't signify

For me to send you one out where you live
In wind-soil to a depth of thirty feet,
And every acre good enough to eat,
As fine as flour put through a baker's sieve

I'd ship a smooth one you could slap and chafe,
And set up like a statue in your yard,
An eolith palladium to guard
The West and keep the old tradition safe

Carve nothing on it You can simply say
In self-defense to quizzical inquiry
"The portrait of the soul of my grandsir Ira
It came from where he came from anyway"

A SERIOUS STEP LIGHTLY TAKEN

Between two burrs on the map
Was a hollow-headed snake
The burrs were hills, the snake was a stream,
And the hollow head was a lake

And the dot in *front* of a name
Was what should be a town
And there might be a house we could buy
For only a dollar down

With two wheels low in the ditch
We left our boiling car,
And knocked at the door of a house we found,
And there to-day we are

It is turning three hundred years
On our cisatlantic shore
For family after family name
We'll make it three hundred more

For our name farming here,
Aloof yet not aloof,
Enriching soil and increasing stock,
Repairing fence and roof,

A hundred thousand days
Of front-page paper events,
A half a dozen major wars,
And forty-five presidents

THE LITERATE FARMER AND THE PLANET VENUS

A Dated Popular-Science Medley
on a Mysterious Light Recently Observed in the
Western Sky at Evening

My unexpected knocking at the door
Started chairs thundering on the kitchen floor,
Knives and forks ringing on the supper plates,
Voices conflicting like the candidates
A mighty farmer flung the house door wide,
He and a lot of children came outside,
And there on an equality we stood
That's the time knocking at a door did good

"I stopped to compliment you on this star
You get the beauty of from where you are
To see it so, the bright and only one
In sunset light, you'd think it was the sun
That hadn't sunk the way it should have sunk,
But right in heaven was slowly being shrunk
So small as to be virtually gone,
Yet there to watch the darkness coming on—
Like someone dead permitted to exist
Enough to see if he was greatly missed
I didn't see the sun set Did it set?
Will anybody swear that isn't it?
And will you give me shelter for the night?
If not, a glass of milk will be all right"

"Traveler, I'm glad you asked about that light
Your mind mistrusted there was something wrong,
And naturally you couldn't go along
Without inquiring if 'twas serious
'Twas providential you applied to us,
Who were just on the subject when you came
There is a star that's Serious by name
And nature too, but this is not the same
This light's been going on for several years,
Although at times we think it disappears
You'll hear all sorts of things You'll meet with them
Will tell you it's the star of Bethlehem
Above some more religion in a manger
But put that down to superstition, Stranger
What's a star doing big as a baseball?
Between us two it's not a star at all
It's a new patented electric light,
Put up on trial by that Jerseyite
So much is being now expected of,
To give developments the final shove
And turn us into the next specie folks
Are going to be, unless these monkey jokes
Of the last fifty years are all a libel,
And Darwin's proved mistaken, not the Bible
I s'pose you have your notions on the vexed
Question of what we're turning into next"

"As liberals we're willing to give place
To any demonstrably better race,
No matter what the color of its skin

(But what a human race the white has been!
I heard a fellow in a public lecture
On Pueblo Indians and their architecture
Declare that if such Indians inherited
The condemned world the legacy was merited
So far as he, the speaker, was concerned
He had his ticket bought, his passage earned,
To take the *Mayflower* back where he belonged
Before the Indian race was further wronged
But come, enlightened as in talk you seem,
You don't believe that that first-water gleam
Is not a star?"

"Believe it? Why, I know it
Its actions any cloudless night will show it
You'll see it be allowed up just so high,
Say about halfway up the western sky,
And then get slowly, slowly pulled back down

You might not notice if you've lived in town,
As I suspect you have A town debars
Much notice of what's going on in stars
The idea is no doubt to make one job
Of lighting the whole night with one big blob
Of electricity in bulk the way
The sun sets the example in the day"

"Here come more stars to character the skies,
And they in the estimation of the wise
Are more divine than any bulb or arc,

Because their purpose is to flash and spark,
But not to take away the precious dark
We need the interruption of the night
To ease attention off when overtight,
To break our logic in too long a flight,
And ask us if our premises are right "

"Sick talk, sick talk, sick sentimental talk!
It doesn't do you any good to walk
I see what *you* are can't get you excited
With hopes of getting mankind unbenighted
Some ignorance takes rank as innocence
Have it for all of me and have it dense
The slave will never thank his manumitter,
Which often makes the manumitter bitter "

"In short, you think that star a patent medicine
Put up to cure the world by Mr Edison "

"You said it—that's exactly what it is
My son in Jersey says a friend of his
Knows the old man and nobody's so deep
In incandescent lamps and ending sleep
The old man argues science cheapened speed
A good cheap anti-dark is now the need
Give us a good cheap twenty-four-hour day,
No part of which we'd have to waste, I say,
And who knows where we can't get! Wasting time
In sleep or slowness is the deadly crime
He gave up sleep himself some time ago,

It puffs the face and brutalizes so
You take the ugliness all so much dread,
Called getting out of the wrong side of bed
That is the source perhaps of human hate,
And well may be where wars originate
Get rid of that and there'd be left no great
Of either murder or war in any land
You know how cunningly mankind is planned·
We have one loving and one hating hand
The loving's made to hold each other like,
While with the hating other hand we strike
The blow can be no stronger than the clutch,
Or soon we'd bat each other out of touch,
And the fray wouldn't last a single round
And still it's bad enough to badly wound,
And if our getting up to start the day
On the right side of bed would end the fray,
We'd hail the remedy But it's been tried
And found, he says, a bed has no right side
The trouble is, with that receipt for love,
A bed's got no right side to get out of
We can't be trusted to the sleep we take,
And simply must evolve to stay awake
He thinks that chairs and tables will endure,
But beds—in less than fifty years he's sure
There will be no such piece of furniture
He's surely got it in for cots and beds
No need for us to rack our common heads
About it, though We haven't got the mind
It best be left to great men of his kind

Who have no other object than our good
There's a lot yet that isn't understood
Ain't it a caution to us not to fix
No limits to what rose in rubbing sticks
On fire to scare away the pterodix
When man first lived in caves along the creeks?"

"Marvelous world in nineteen-twenty-six"

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